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Alexander Cockburn: Kennedy and his killer

Saddam's new gassing

Angela Phillips: Who needs fathers?

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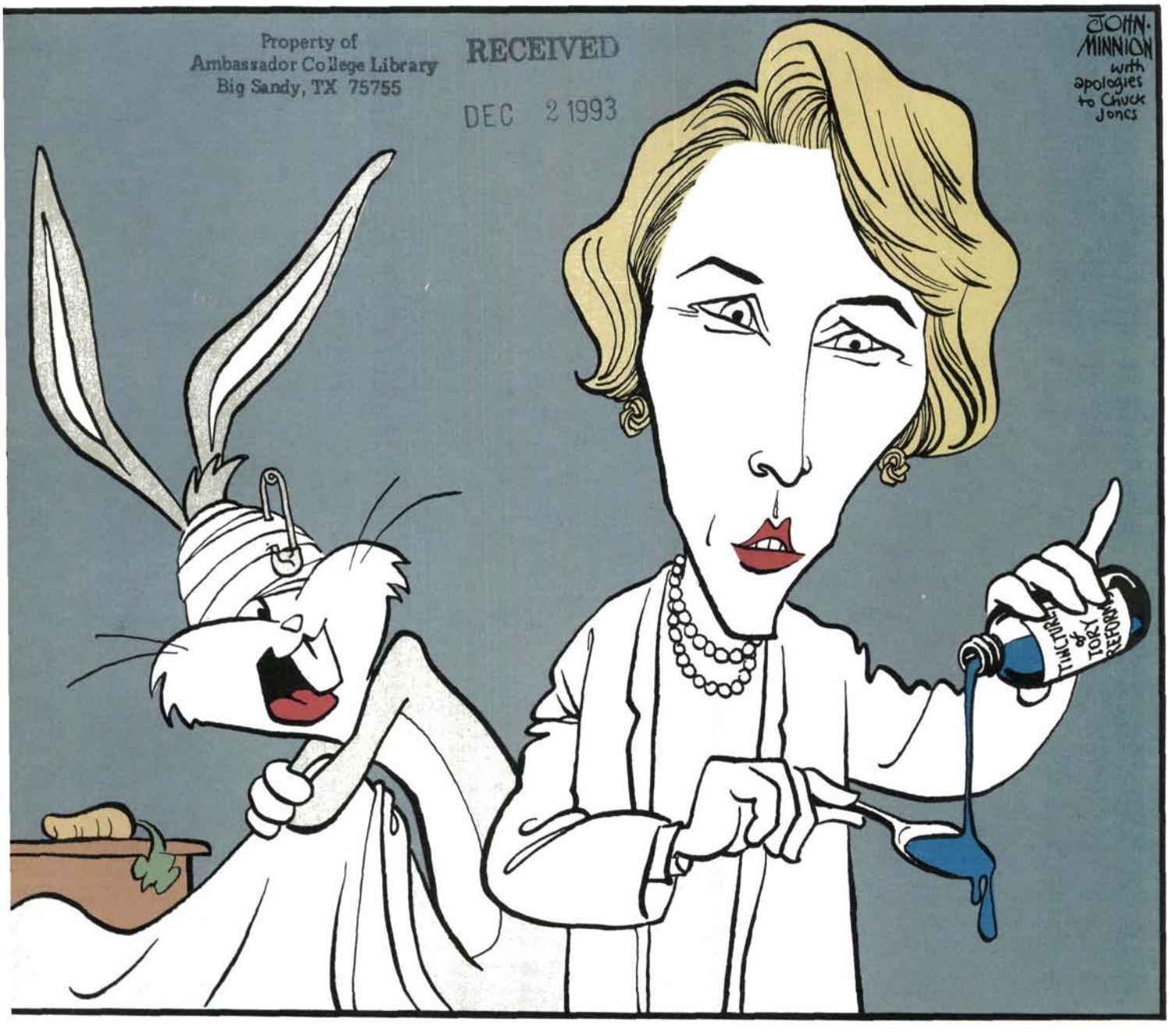

What's up Doc?

Wendy Savage, Julian Le Grand and Kirsty Milne taste the Tory medicine

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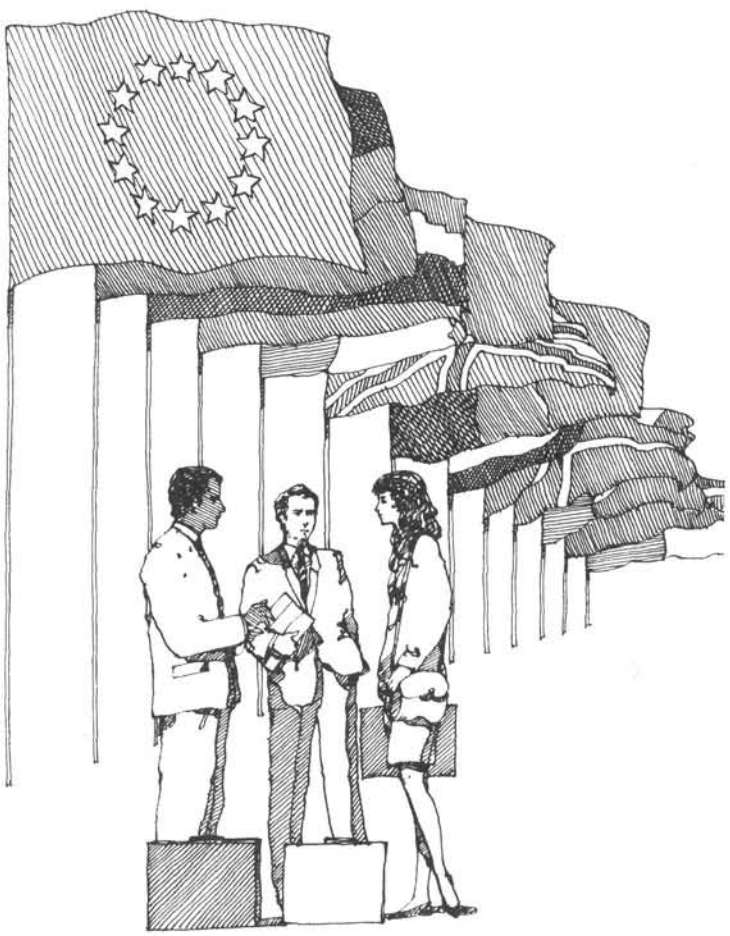

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CONTENTS

REGULARS

5 Editorial
Back to basics

6 Felix Bennett

7 Shoreditch, Fourth Estate

8 Diary
Ethics man Sean French decides not to keep it in the ideal family

9 John Cole
Major's continental drift

10 News From Elsewhere
Return to Sendero; Guyana's leftist survivor

11 Letter from America

13 Influences
Paddy Ashdown

14 John Pilger
The world according to Disney

15 Sideliners, Edward Pearce

28 Bill Greenwell

34 Letters, This England

37 Fringe Benefits

53 Endgames, Crossword

55 Backchat, Forteana

COVER: John Minnion

COVER STORY – What's up Doc?

17 Accidents will happen
Hospitals are becoming more secretive, but Kirsty Milne was allowed into casualty at the Whittington, north London, to watch the shifts that pass in the night

20 Will the NHS survive the operation?
More than 6,000 nurses have left the NHS since 1986, while more than 20,000 administrators have joined. Wendy Savage related a woeful saga of disorganisation

22 For better or worse
Critics should be wary of heaping abuse on health service reforms. Patients may be getting a better deal, says Julian Le Grand

FEATURES

12 Not giving a fox for the sabbers
The bloodsports lobby is conducting a PR offensive to outfox its critics. Nyta Mann went along for the ride

24 Guerillas in the mist
Kurdish struggles in Iraq and Turkey still make the news, but few journalists have entered Kurdish Iran since 1980. Gareth Smyth discovers a forgotten war

26 Turning away from genocide
Shi'ite children die from Saddam's poison gas. But the media has moved on and with it the world's manipulated ability to care, writes Julie Flint

27 Graft excluder
The Scott Inquiry should look at corruption in the military exports business, says Patrick Fitzgerald

28 Unfree trade
Praful Bidwai says that the Gatt agreement caters only to the north, and will impoverish and enslave the third world

30 Propaganda of the deed
Thirty years after the assassination of JFK, Alexander Cockburn argues that Lee Harvey Oswald was motivated to kill by honest left-wing principles

32 Like father, like son
Tory politicians claim that fatherless children are prone to criminality, but Angela Phillips finds that the evidence is that fathers are often worse than useless; and Sarah Baxter takes a dim view of *Families Without Fatherhood*

38 SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT

Land of the free-for-all
Alexander Cockburn says that however the Nafta vote goes, there will be a lot of losers, including the environment

Green Gauge
Vicky Hutchings finds that the great thing about eco-tourism is that it makes her feel better about her package holiday

41 ARTS IN SOCIETY

Atlantic soul stars
Overpraised and over here? Aleks Sierz gives two cheers for US imports on stage

Museums
Safe haven or capital of bigotry? Boyd Tonkin on immigrants to London

Film
Jonathan Romney stays cool about designer bloodshed

Television
Wild Palms sends Jaci Stephen out of her tree

44 BOOKS

Market forces
David Cesarani tracks the rise of the right in the east

Italy's leading men
Robert Carver says addio, Fellini; Nicholas Till welcomes a new view of Verdi

US myths . . .
Simon Louvish unmasks the lies that hid Iraqgate; Vicky Hutchings looks at America's eye on the poor world

. . . and US fiction
Wendy Brandmark on the Indians of east and west; Laurence O'Toole on weird tales from young writers

PrintOut
Lessons for John Patten

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Before they're roasted in garlic and rosemary they're soaked in urine and excrement.

The trucks that carry livestock across Europe hold up to 800 sheep at a time.

The journeys can last over twenty-four hours, but the animals' bladders cannot. They begin to urinate and excrete inside the lorry.

One sheep produces around a litre of urine and 700 grammes of faeces a day.

And so do the other 799.

Since they are trapped in such a confined space their fleeces quickly become coated in droppings.

For the rest of the trip they're wet, cold and some even suffer skin burns.

Eventually the urinating stops, but only because the animals are given no water in transit.

The size of Continental trucks means that unfamiliar flocks are often mixed together (an unsettling experience for any animal).

In the crush the weaker sheep lose their footing, fall to the floor and are trampled by the others.

Some die.

And all this happens so European meat traders can squeeze a little more profit from their livestock.

The sheep could be slaughtered close to their farms, refrigerated and then transported (a method favoured by many farmers).

But offal and hides fetch a slightly higher price abroad and freshly killed meat is also at a premium, so the practice continues.

At least until the law is changed.

EC agriculture ministers are about to meet to discuss livestock transportation regulations.

The RSPCA want to see an eight hour limit on the transportation of live animals for slaughter enforced immediately across the European Community.

Britain's representative at the negotiations is Gillian Shephard and there's still time to let her know your views on the crucial issue of maximum journey time.

Which is why we need your help.

Please phone the number below for a free RSPCA information pack and to find out what further action you can take.

Perhaps we can then persuade Mrs Shephard to look after our sheep.

RSPCA
REG. CHARITY 219099

STOP THE NEEDLESS TRANSPORTATION OF ANIMALS. PHONE 0500 34 35 36.

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Andrzej Krauze

Back to basics

It should have been a slogan to set Tory hearts a-flutter. "Back to basics" conjures up the simple pleasures of the stocks and birching; of children sitting in rows to learn their three Rs; of Mr and Mrs Average instructing their little Averages in upward mobility and Christian morality.

Alas, John Major is discovering that not everyone thrills to these archetypes (not even all Conservatives, as Sir Edward Heath demonstrated last weekend). But what's interesting about these "basics" (in a previous decade, we called them "Victorian values") is the ideology they lay bare. Major's fumbling fundamentalism should act as a spur for the left to do some philosophising of its own. Here's a chance to shout from the high plateau of principle, instead of mucking about in the valleys of policy detail.

So what is there on the plateau? What would a left "back to basics" programme look like? For a start, full employment: an ideal that now seems more honoured in the breach than the observance. As John Cole noted in his column here last week, "I can think of no more basic 'basic' than a job, with which a man and woman can support their family."

Not for nothing is this a Protestant country. The work ethic runs deep, and there's a case for the psychic importance of jobs that is rarely made. It's acceptable to talk about labour market statistics, but we scarcely have the vocabulary to describe what work gives people psychologically: structure in their lives, a sense of purpose, and a sense of self-worth. There is a moral dimension here. One of the Conservatives' most remarkable achievements has been to detach the values of self-help and self-reliance from the work ethic, so that people without jobs are blamed for becoming part of the "dependency culture". When mining communities are tipped onto the slag heap, we do not hear government ministers linking the decimation of the coalfields to social security expenditure.

Crime comes in here, too, and particularly juvenile crime. There has been a resurgence of feminist interest in how boys' developing masculinity becomes skewed towards criminality (see Angela Phillips, page 32). An obvious point, but worth making, is that unemployment has deprived boys of their traditional rite of passage into adulthood. Which is not to say that the left should not be examining the role of fathers in the socialisation process, and defending, if necessary, a single mother's right to choose her own lifestyle.

Choice for those with children implies child care, which should certainly figure in a list of left "basics". Child care is a prime candidate for collective provision, yet the government expects every family to make its own arrangements. It is blindingly obvious that the way to get single parents off benefit is to give them the chance to work or to train for work. How can they take that chance unless they know their children are in good hands?

The care of children also relates to the debate about crime. Education Secretary John Patten knows this. He used to talk about "intervening" at an early stage to deal with "problem children", whom experts claim can be identified as potential offenders. Yet this week, he categorically rejected the National Commission on Education's call for every child to be able to go to nursery school—even though research shows that nursery-educated boys are less likely to become delinquent, and girls less likely to become pregnant teenagers.

Education, as the Liberal Democrats shrewdly recognised at the last election, can be a vote winner. So can health. Public services still inspire enthusiasm, with poll after poll showing people prepared to pay more tax to improve them. Of course the welfare state needs updating and reform, but the principle of free collective provision is as strong as ever.

This loyalty is as characteristic of the people who work in the public services as it is of the people who use them. Not everyone wants to be part of an "enterprise culture"; not everyone wants to be a fat-cat consultant. In the health service, as Kirsty Milne reports (page 17), talented young people are still prepared to work long hours for money that can't compare with what the private sector could offer. An important element in a left-wing "moral rearmament" campaign would be to raise the status of caring. To take one example, how can you have a policy of "community care" without listening to those who look after the elderly and the mentally ill?

What damaged the image of public services, and allowed the Conservatives to undermine them, was a perceived remoteness and lack of accountability. Never again. We need a firm stand against government appointees and quangos, be they in health authorities, training and enterprise councils (TECs), or inner-city urban development corporations. The same commitment to accountability should apply to local government, which must be revitalised and restored to its rightful place in the community. The scandal that lets London lurch into the 21st century without an elected authority should be quite unthinkable.

"Back to basics" would also take in the fundamentals of race and sex equality. We should be ready to signal far more strongly our moral contempt for discrimination, and enforce that disapproval through the law. Civil rights—the right to join a trade union, for instance—should be vigorously defended. Organisations such as Charter 88, which has been banging on about rights and citizenship in an often unfriendly environment, have done useful work on how to win popular support for these rather abstract ideas.

But our moral rearmament campaign needs a modernist twist. The left has too often been guilty of the same mistake John Major is making now: sounding nostalgic. On this side of the political spectrum, 1945 is still treated as the high water mark of achievement, a harking-back which means little to today's young people. We need a few futurist thinkers to dream up a socialist vision of how the 21st century should look.

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Ireland's opportunity

Just about the only thing that is clear after the past week's manouevring over Northern Ireland is that Sinn Fein has an unprecedented opportunity to create an opening for peace. The British government had given the impression until this week that it was extremely sceptical about the possibility of a permanent IRA ceasefire that John Hume, leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, insisted was on the table after his talks with Gerry Adams. But the tone of John Major's speech to the Lord Mayor's banquet on Monday was very different.

Major made it clear that he would not allow a unionist veto on Sinn Fein entering the peace process. It was, in effect, an offer to Sinn Fein to open talks—on condition, of course, that it renounced violence, and after some appropriate period had passed to prove its good intentions.

Sinn Fein's immediate response was that Major's condition was irrelevant because it had not applied earlier this year, when British government representatives had met at least one senior Sinn Feiner. This claim has been hotly disputed, with some commentators arguing that if it turns out that the meetings really did take place, the government will lose all credibility and the hopes for progress in a peace process will be dashed.

But past government-Sinn Fein relations are a side issue. The key question is not what happened earlier this year but what happens next. And with only Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party indicating that it will under no circumstances deal with a Sinn Fein that has turned its back on the armed struggle, it would be the height of folly for Sinn Fein not to accept Major's offer.

Of course, that would not necessarily be the end of the Troubles. Even if Sinn Fein renounces violent means—in other words, gets the IRA to lay down its arms—there will be some nationalists, inevitably, who decide that the bullet and bomb, not the ballot box, is the way forward. The Republican Sinn Fein organisation, for instance, which claims to be to "official" Sinn Fein today what the Provisionals were to the Official IRA in the early 1970s, made clear at its conference last month that it would continue the armed fight regardless of what the Provos decide.

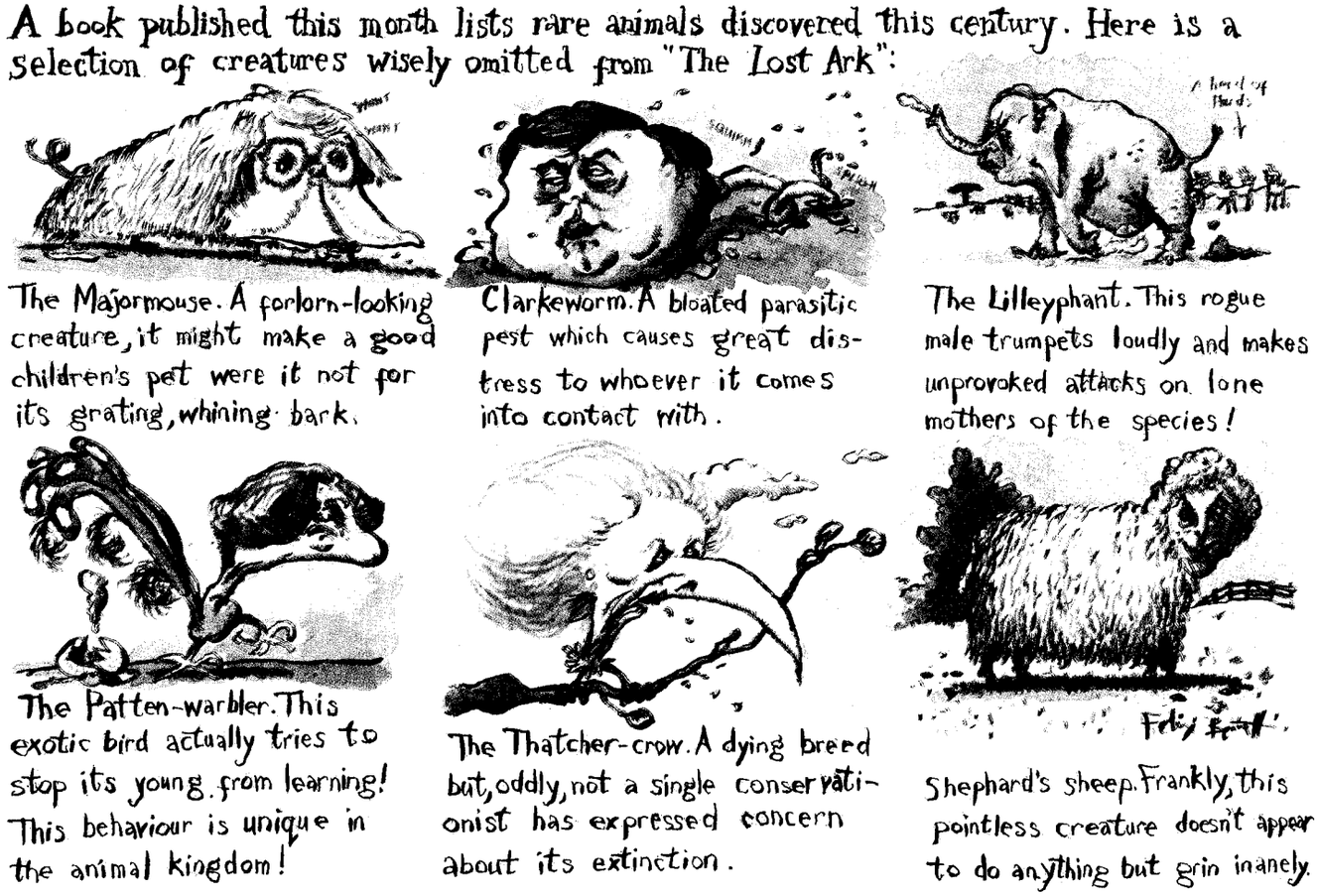
How many others take such a course depends crucially on what is done to curb the loyalist paramilitaries, whose murderous ways are increasingly the main legitimation, in the eyes of many working-class Catholics, for the IRA's armed struggle. Of the 85 killed in Northern Ireland last year, nine more were murdered by loyalists than republicans. If the UDA, UFF *et al*, whipped up by the DUP's rhetoric of betrayal, are allowed to respond to Sinn Fein's inclusion in a peace process by stepping up their terror campaign, it is certain that significant numbers of nationalists will respond in kind, whether or not their organisation is called the IRA.

So the *quid pro quo* for an IRA ceasefire must be effective measures against loyalist violence—but of course these are much easier to advocate than to devise. And even if they are succesfully applied, there is no guarantee that talks on a new constitutional settlement for Northern Ireland will not break down, to be followed by a reversion to killing and sectarian hatred.

Doubts must also remain about what agreements have been reached behind the scenes between Major and the unionists. Ian Paisley and his DUP have reacted to the idea of peace talks with predictable fire and brimstone. But the other strains of unionist opinion have been surprisingly moderate in their responses. What promises have been made to keep them so sweet? A Northern Ireland select committee alone is surely not sufficient. Have they been told, then, that whatever is said publicly—for the benefit of Albert Reynolds' domestic political considerations in Eire, perhaps—the unionists will retain an effective right of veto over anything of which they disapprove?

Nevertheless, the ball is now firmly in Sinn Fein's court. If it is serious about peace, the onus is upon it to respond positively. Only then can unionist intent be tested.

FELIX BENNETT


A book published this month lists rare animals discovered this century. Here is a selection of creatures wisely omitted from "The Lost Ark":
The Majormouse. A forlorn-looking creature, it might make a good children's pet were it not for its grating, whining bark.
Clarkeworm. A bloated parasitic pest which causes great distress to whoever it comes into contact with.
The Lilleyphant. This rogue male trumpets loudly and makes unprovoked attacks on lone mothers of the species!
The Patten-warbler. This exotic bird actually tries to stop its young from learning! This behaviour is unique in the animal kingdom!
The Thatcher-crow. A dying breed but, oddly, not a single conservationist has expressed concern about its extinction.
Shephard's sheep. Frankly, this pointless creature doesn't appear to do anything but grin inanely.

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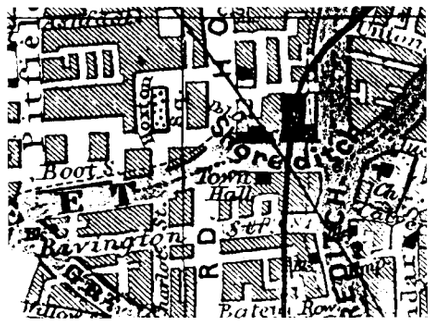

Who Do They Think They Are bulletin: MPs have taken up the fight against yet another disturbing example of persecution at the hands of the police; a group of members have made representations to the Speaker of the House, complaining that officers patrolling Parliament Square have stopped holding up the traffic to let MPs flit effortlessly through rush-hour jams to vote. "That is in breach of processional orders," complains Anthony Steen, Conservative MP for South Hams. New Scotland Yard, however, is insistent that it has not stopped putting up roadblocks at the convenience of our elected defenders of democracy. Which must come as a relief to Mr Steen, who has to drive to the Commons all the way from his office—a distance of a quarter of a mile.

Still on the subject of parliamentary protocol, Shoreditch can reveal that the end of the top hat's role in the constitution could be on the cards. Following the head-gear shenanigans in the Commons earlier this month, when MPs had the time of their lives donning the hat to raise points of order during the debate on rail privatisation, Labour's constitutional affairs spokesman Graham Allen wrote to Sir Peter Emery, who chairs the Commons select committee on procedure, to ask whether the top hat wasn't just a little old-fashioned as an instrument of democracy.

Sir Peter has now replied to Allen, in a delightfully informal letter. "I can appreciate your point of view," he writes. "I will have the matter of points of order during a division further considered by the procedure committee."

Things may have gone a bit wobbly in the offices of the Mirror as Mirror Group's share price quailed at the height of last week's "Di Spy" gym snaps saga, but MGN chief executive David Montgomery kept his cool; while every arch-buffoon within earshot was yelling "Boycott!" and "Sell!", Montgomery splashed out £38,000 on 25,000 shares in the comany, sold at 151.5p each, for his own personal account. Within a few hours he had clocked up a nice little paper profit of several pence as the price picked up, presumably when everyone else realised the entire affair was fuelled largely by hyperbole.

Accusations of bias have been received at Radio Four's *A Week in Westminster* programme. A general "lack of balance" and left-wing slant are among the charges laid. One particularly outraged listener rang the BBC to complain that there were simply "too many lefties" appearing on the show now that its regular presenter had been replaced by a new voice. Who is the new anchorman so insidiously colouring the weekly political analysis on the world's most respected broadcasting institution? None other than the distinctly un-socialist Simon Heffer, deputy editor of the *Spectator*, who is temporarily filling in as the show's presenter.

Ever since the Sunday Times claimed, in the wake of last month's anti-racist demonstration in south-east London, that "An advance intelligence report by Special Branch identified several extremist groups" as "'category 1' extremists who went to south-east London determined to cause trouble", members of the black anti-racist group Panther UK—named as one of the "category 1" groups along with Militant (which set Panther UK up but has now broken off relations) and the Socialist Workers' Party—have been scratching their heads wondering not only how they achieved the status but also what, exactly, it means. But the organisation—which, it must be said, commands a membership on the three-men-and-a-dog scale—can perhaps take take comfort from the fact that the forces of law'n'order also seem to have little idea. "I've never heard of it before. Are you sure it's a force term?" a baffled Met spokeswoman asked Shoreditch.

After some double-checking, she added: "No one else here knows what it is either, so we reckon it might be one of those things that even if we did know what it was, we couldn't tell you." Shoreditch inquired whether it involved suitability ratings for phone-tapping, surveillance, and other such secret squirrel activities. "Y'know, it does sound like that sort of thing, doesn't it?" came the reply.

Perhaps it's just a coincidence, but no sooner had *NSS* editor Steve Platt managed to break an office window last weekend ("It got caught in a gust of wind," he says) than a missive arrived at the office from Damart, purveyors of quality thermal underwear to the nation. "As we all know, it can be really difficult to keep warm, especially if you are working in the cold and remain immobile for any length of time either indoors or out," writes commercial manager Joanne Bell, describing perfectly current working conditions at Perseverance Works. "have you ever thought about how to keep your workforce at the Statesman and Nation Publishing Company warm while performing in an environment that is constantly cold and draughty? If you have never tried thermal underwear before then there is no time like the present to consider how to insulate your workforce against the cold." *NSS*'s insurers have already questioned Mr Platt as to when exactly he received his long-johns.

FOURTH ESTATE

A regular monitor of the tabloid press

12 November: "Bill Clinton is starting to act like a real president," says the *Sun*. The reason turns out to be Bill's prompt action in banning Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams from visiting the US. As the *Sun* says of Bill, "He knows a rat when he sees one."

The *Express* has Michael Howard "laying into Whitehall 'Trotskys'." This seems rather an extreme way to characterise Home Office civil servants—and hardly an appropriate epithet for the nice, liberal David Faulkner, the ex-mandarin whose remarks about criminal justice policy provoked the Home Secretary's riposte. In fact, the Trotsky jibe wasn't Howard's. It was attributed to those convenient, unnamed "Tory MPs" who can always be relied upon to chorus reliably and quotably in the background.

The *Sun* notes coyly that Sooty's consort, Soo, is pregnant.

13 November: "Good Golly he's a wally!" shouts the *Star*, ridiculing Lonnie Lane, the Greenwich day-care adviser who objected to a golliwog he found in the house of "caring child minder Deena Newton". The *Star* wants Lane ("this track-suited twit of a Rastafarian council officer") to be fired.

Someone else facing the dole is the Australian journalist who sent prematurely doleful news to the Antipodes—and forgot to check his facts. Still, the *Mirror* gets a good headline out of it: "I killed off Queen Mother."

14 November: "They were delightful, charming and radiant pictures of the most famous, most photographed woman in the world." Yes, the *Sunday Mirror* is defending its Di pictures, dismissing "vindictive criticism" and "self-interested bile" from the rest of the press. The paper cites Diana's successful use of the courts to pre-empt more pictures as evidence that "more laws curbing the freedom of the press are simply not needed".

Black Dog in the *Mail on Sunday* has a nice single mother anecdote. A nameless Tory MP is berating a lone parent who's come to talk about her money worries. "Half way through expounding the view that the woman had nobody but herself to blame, the MP was told: 'But my husband died in the Falklands.'"

15 November: "Major halts attack on single mums"—and the *Mirror* takes the credit. The "outcry" at plans to cut lone-parent benefits (led, of course. by the *Mirror*) is said to have panicked the PM. "The Premier has sent out the 'cool it' message to ministers because of a backlash from widows and divorces who fear they will be hammered by the cuts."

16 November: Let us pass over "Jacko goes whacko" (the *Sun*), and consider the *Mail*'s welcome for the idea of universal nursery schooling, as proposed by the National Commission on Education. John Patten gets a ticking-off for rubbishing the idea. "Empty coffers don't justify closed minds," apostrophises the *Mail*, suggesting that money for tots should come from students instead.

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Ethics man **Sean French** decides not to keep it in the ideal family

I keep coming across absurd statements in the press and speculating in a maudlin sort of way about the corrosive use that Roger Woddis might have made of them if he were still alive. The latest example was a statement by the self-appointed socialist spokesman on behalf of the family, Professor A H Halsey, in this week's *Independent on Sunday*: "Socialism is traditional family values extended to the wider community. The family is a socialist organisation. It is as simple as that."

I would love to have seen the Roger Woddis poem—written, perhaps, as an imitation of the famous verse about Lizzie Borden, the girl who gave her mother 40 whacks with an axe—pointing out that traditional family values already have spread out all too effectively into the wider community: there's the abuse, the arguments, the violence and the neglect.

Academics are as ruled by fashion as hemlines are. Twenty-five years ago they were telling us that the family was the source of all our problems, now they are telling us that the institution is intrinsically good, the source of all that is civilised in society, and, we now hear, intrinsically socialist. It's a pity that nobody pointed this out to Ferdinand Mount when he wrote *The Subversive Family*, a view of human society as seen from the vantage point of Mrs Thatcher's think-tank (Mount was in charge of it in the early 1980s). The argument of the book was that the family was an institution that was hated for its self-sufficiency, its very resistance against outside pressures, by totalitarian thinkers like Rousseau, Marx or Jesus Christ, and they systematically set out to destroy it.

I was going to resist saying what seemed almost too self-evident: nice families are a good thing, nasty families are a bad thing. But the new orthodoxy is questioning even this. Even nasty families are better than one-parent families, it is claimed, because children see relationships being negotiated, accommodations and compromises being reached.

I wonder if this argument is sometimes put forward by people who don't know how very nasty a nasty family can be, or even, if the speaker is a Tory MP, who doesn't know what a real family is like at all, since the smaller members have been sent away to that profoundly anti-family institution, the public school. I wouldn't imagine that watching your mother being beaten up or your siblings being sexually abused would be especially helpful in growing up, but then I'm not a social scientist.

One of Mrs Thatcher's more famous utterances has generally been misunderstood, because it was wrenched from its original context. In a *Vanity Fair* interview she was quoted as saying: "Home is the place where you go when you have nothing better to do." This sounded rather like a less resonant, more cynical version of Thomas Wolfe's statement: "Home is the place that when you go there they have to let you in." Professor Halsey would no doubt approve, but of course Wolfe's saying is sadly untrue. The cardboard boxes of London are homes to a whole community of people who have either been expelled from their homes, or have found them intolerable.

But, as was later revealed (though *Vanity Fair* ungraciously refused to apologise), Mrs Thatcher was actually describing what she had said to her daughter when she left home, namely, go out and enjoy yourself, but remember that we are always here for you. Home is the place . . .

Sensible and kind words, I would say, and they also apply rather neatly to the ideological use of the family. If everything goes wrong with your political views and the outside world has become too horrible to bear, then there is always the family that can be returned to as a lost, mythical ideal. When the Queen sensed, quite correctly, that she had lost her role along with her authority, she seized on the idea of the family, specifically the Royal Family, as something she could embody. We don't hear much about that any more.

Mrs Thatcher herself explicitly set the family up against other kinds of state or public association, but the problem was that what she really meant by this was a form of individualism. The economic boom of the mid-1980s depended almost entirely on the women who would work for low wages, with flexible hours and no unions.

Professor Halsey, a self-styled "ethical socialist" (as opposed to all of us unethical socialists, I suppose) is particularly worried about feminism. Mary Braid, writing in the *Independent on Sunday*, summarised his position: "He concludes that 'feminism has been a mixed bag'. On balance, he believes emancipation has been positive, but adult gains have been at the expense of children's happiness and well-being." I don't know whether this last insight derives from his "sound scientific analysis" or his "common sense", both of which he cites to authenticate his argument, but it is clear that he has constructed an idealised version of the family to function like one of those cure-alls that were sold by travelling salesmen at American fairs: The Old-Fashioned Family, guaranteed to stop ram-raiding, reverse the economic decline of Britain, halt teenage pregnancy, stop those feckless young men and selfish feminists, and get dinner on the table when the ethical socialist gets home from a hard day of disinterested scientific analysis at his office.

The idea of extending family values to the wider community sounds like one of those unanswerably good things, like free milk everyday for schoolchildren. But nutritionists now know that there are good reasons for not drinking too much milk and there are equally good reasons for confining the family to its proper place. The intensity of family relationships, in all their complexity and partiality, are both wonderful and terrible, constantly paradoxical, a refuge from which people struggle to escape, a prison in which they confine themselves.

Civil society should be based on other, less frenzied, less emotional sorts of impulse, to do with rights, obligations, contracts, friendship, respect and so on. There are plenty of countries in the world that are like families, where it is like a Christmas Day get-together every day of the year with all the squabbles, sulks, rows and depressions as well as the exhilaration that goes with that. The catastrophe in the former Yugoslavia looks to me like a family squabble with mortars and rocket launchers. South Africa is on the brink of civil war because of the elevation of tribal, family, values over, say, the rights of the individual.

Professor Halsey would argue, no doubt, that he is in favour of nice families, and aren't we all, but even nice things may not work on a different scale. If you made a man 20 feet tall, his skeleton would collapse under its own weight. People have fistfights about who is going to hold the television remote control. Blow that up to a national scale and you end by shelling children's homes.

Civilised life depends on values that are not just opposite, but entirely different from the emotions we feel when we are sitting round the breakfast table (and yelling across it, in our case). Totalitarian states are like parents who are nagging you to wash behind your ears and they aren't going to let you do what's bad for you. As my parents used to say: "If we didn't care for you, we would just let you sit there watching television, but we love you, so switch the bloody thing off and go and do something more worthwhile."

If something goes wrong with a member of your family, you have to go through agony sorting it out. I don't, except in very particular circumstances (seeing a child fall into a pond, or something like that), want that obligation to be of a general kind. That's what the state is there for. The kind acts of the Good Samaritan were all very well, but if there had been a Palestinian National Health Service he could have saved his two pence, and if the road between Jerusalem and Jericho had been properly policed the incident would never have occurred at all.

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Major's continental drift

Back to basics: it is the economy that determines any government's electoral fortunes, and John Major cannot buck that market. A moral majority is not a political majority, even if, for a time, concentration on a social agenda may divert the media from any obsessive—and, for the government, uncomfortable—interest in unemployment, the trade figures and the budget deficit.

But as Parliament returns this week for a session that is crucial to the Prime Minister's future, he must have the uneasy feeling that his ability to influence the economy is even more limited than that of predecessors. The growth of information technology and the freeing of currency markets have savagely loosened the levers by which national governments purported to control their economies.

I write "purported", because even before the financial revolution of the past decade, more perceptive Chancellors of the Exchequer always understood that they were operating on the margins, trying to nudge the economy a degree or two in the direction they wanted it to go, but were never in any meaningful sense in full control.

What makes the whole conundrum even more complex than before is the cloud that hangs over Britain's relations with Europe. As the CBI's unexpectedly strident utterances show, many of our biggest industrialists are unhappy at the recent tone of ministerial pronouncements. Ministers who rubbished Jacques Delors at the Conservative conference in Blackpool doubtless believed they were helping to restore party unity after the traumas of Maastricht. That was presumably one objective of the Prime Minister's own *Economist* article.

But nervous businessmen are left wondering, yet again, whether the market in which the bulk of their business is now carried out, on which many British jobs depend, is to be sacrificed on the altar of political vacillation. Are we to be at the heart of Europe or not? Industrially, we have no choice. But are political feet to be dragged forever?

What brings the subject to the boil again is the elections for the European Parliament next June. Pity the poor party strategists preparing manifestos and other plans for the campaigns! John Smith has already had his troubles, over the European socialist agenda, and will expect to receive a lot more aggro before June from Sir Norman Fowler.

Yet the Conservatives, as the governing party, have the most to worry about. Something like panic has set in over the possible prospect of Liberal Democrat victories in the west country (just as there is great nervousness about possible Labour inroads in the local government elections in London next May). Now most politicos suspect that the European elections will be, yet again, not about Europe at all, but a referendum—the equivalent of a mid-term, country-wide by-election—measuring the popularity of the government.

But might the European issue itself not matter a little bit? Tory leaders remember, with a shudder, the effect of Margaret Thatcher's disdainful and maladroit campaign in 1989. It was in tune with her later, and famous, "no, no, no", which caused Geoffrey Howe to resign, and subsequently to reach for the vitriol in a resignation speech that unseated his Prime Minister. One of those "noes" rejected any thought of an influential European parliament. In her memoirs, astonishingly, she still sticks to the word "assembly". In the 1989 election, these same attitudes had made many Conservative voters conclude, not unreasonably, that if their leader thought so little of this "assembly", they could not be bothered going out to vote for her candidates.

The familiar dread that the original six Common Market nations will move ahead has been realised in industry

Parenthetically, it is not always easy to detect when the electoral earth is moving, as it did then. During that campaign, I was at a party attended by many politicians, mostly from the left of the Conservative Party. A number of them and, more particularly, their wives, were highly critical of Mrs Thatcher's tone, and said, with a certain braggadocio, that their offspring intended to vote Green.

At the time, I thought this was all talk, and was unconvinced that the Green vote would rise substantially. But when the results revealed the size of the protest, I deduced that, quite apart from the youthful scions of Conservatism, some Tory MP's wives, perhaps even the MPs, had really been signalling that they themselves intended to vote Green.

Douglas Hurd is leading a carefully selected committee of MPs, MEPs and party officials or advisers in drawing up a manifesto which is intended to be "positive". But he has also said that he wants to find ground on which his whole party can camp. The trouble is that it does not seem open to the Foreign Secretary to produce a programme that will suit many of the big companies in the Confederation of British Industry, mostly Tory supporters, which favour the adoption of a single currency for Europe.

The familiar dread, that the core countries of Europe—basically the original Six Common Market nations—will move ahead, leaving Britain in its customary position as tail-end Charlie, has been realised in industry. Ministers and many economists assure us that the single currency will simply not happen in the short-or medium-term. And yet . . .

What does seem probable is that the new European parliament will flex its muscles. An obscure clause in the Maastricht Treaty may facilitate that long-delayed process. The parliament has always had the right to dismiss the Commission as a whole, though not individual commissioners.

But the treaty now provides that the new commissioners, to be nominated after horse-trading among the 12 member governments, must be ratified at Strasbourg. And the parliament has smartly changed its procedures, to allow "advise and consent" committee hearings. If activist MEPs have their way, these will be modelled on the hearings during which the US Senate has given successive presidents such grief over their nominees for cabinet posts and for the Supreme Court.

The political consequences could be considerable. With centre-right governments in most major nations in Europe, it has been expected that the new commission, after the retirement from Brussels of Jacques Delors, will have a distinctly right-of-centre flavour. Ruud Lubbers, the Dutch prime minister, is keen to take on the presidency, and the British government, among others, hope life would be more comfortable with him at the helm. They certainly would prefer him to the possible candidate of the left, Felipe Gonzalez, the Spanish prime minister.

But suppose, as some Conservative MEPs fear, that the socialist bloc retains its majority in Strasbourg. Would it take the opportunity to use its new powers, and decide that the proposed commission is not to its political taste? The parliament elected in June 1994 is due to begin its hearings that September. If there were a real wrestling match, this process might readily become deadlocked, with neither the Council of Ministers, representing governments, nor the newly elected parliament, prepared to give way.

The new commission is due to take office on 1 January 1995. Should the need arise, what price asking Jacques Delors to carry on as a caretaker?

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Return to Sendero

The shanty towns of Lima are desperately poor and the most desperate of them all is Canto Grande, the Lima stronghold of the Sendero Luminoso guerrilla movement.

In is an eerie, desolate place of half-built houses, which have no water and no electricity. Outsiders are not welcome. The police do not go there except for occasional sorties and in great force. Taxi drivers will not go there. Adding to the isolation, there is no telephone for at least three miles. Two men who took mobile phones home were shot by Sendero guerrillas who claimed that they were police spies.

Diana Gamerra, one of a small group of community workers attempting to provide some infrastructure for Canto Grande, says: "Sendero is unpredictable. If it signalled we were no longer welcome, I would not hesitate to pull our workers out. People join Sendero because they have no hope. You either do social work or you become a terrorist."

Is Sendero capable of expanding from places like Canto Grande and taking over Peru? After the arrest of Sendero leader Abimail Guzman in a Lima flat last September, President Alberto Fujimori triumphantly claimed that Sendero would be annihilated by 1995. But his prediction is already looking hollow. Sendero is regrouping. It has been wounded by the arrest of Guzman and other leaders—but not fatally.

Sendero was created by Guzman when he was a philosophy professor in Ayacucho, a provincial capital. He planned his revolution for 15 years, recruiting from students, and launched his armed struggle in 1980. The philosophical basis was Maoism, the strategy maximum terror. Since then, about 27,000 people have been killed in the civil war, many at the hands of the army.

With Guzman in jail, three factions have been competing for control of Sendero. The old brigade, consisting of those close to Guzman in Ayacucho in the early years who opposed his decision in 1990 to switch the focus of the campaign from the countryside to the capital, is in control at present, though this is likely to prove to be only temporary. The second faction, consisting of those closest to Guzman latterly and which supported the assault on Lima, is mainly in jail and unable to exert much control. The third, and the one most likely to emerge on top, is the Sendero regional command fighting in the Huallaga Valley, the main battle front with the army.

The command of Sendero in the Huallaga is relatively intact and allegedly has access to plenty of money through providing protection for drug traffickers, the main trade in the valley, the source of about a third of the world's cocaine. Although Sendero sympathisers dispute a connection with the drug trade,

people in the valley speak of it as a fact of life.

Who is going to stop Sendero? Probably not the government. Fujimori, elected in 1990 when voters decided to snub the established parties, narrowly won support in a referendum earlier this month for a new constitution that legitimises his seizure of near-dictatorial powers last year. But his popularity is waning, not least because his zeal in fighting inflation, pursuing privatisation and servicing international debts has placed a huge strain on an already desperately thin infrastructure.

If Sendero had attempted to win popular support, instead of alienating the public by its ruthlessness, it would be in power by now. Just about everyone outside Fujimori's inner circle reckons that unless Peru's social problems are addressed, there will be Sendero for decades to come—or something worse.

Ewen MacAskill

75 YEARS AGO

16 November 1918

The New Statesman comments on the situation in Germany following the signing of the armistice that ended the first world war

So far everything confirms the general anticipation amongst those that know the Germans that their revolution would be an orderly one. Whilst Hindenburg and the other military, naval and civil servants of the old regime remain temporarily "carrying on" in their old posts, every throne in Germany has been overturned, and the reins of government are everywhere being assumed by Socialist parties working in unison with Soldiers' and Workmen's Councils . . . The Government is half Majority and half Minority Socialists. There are no members of the Spartacus group (i.e. allies of the Bolsheviks) here, and there is every reason to believe that, provided famine is avoided, the extremist elements will not make much headway . . . the German temperament is lacking in the generous extravagance which often leads honest men into wild courses at times of crisis.

Jagan makes up for lost time

Forty years ago, immediately after its first election based on full adult suffrage, the constitution of the colony of British Guyana was suspended and British troops invaded the capital, Georgetown.

The deposed prime minister, Cheddi Jagan, became the darling of the British Bevanites and a thorn in the side of Britain's Colonial Office. Although his People's Progressive Party went on to win the next two elections, it took more than a decade of constitutional chicanery and interference before Westminster was able to hand independence for Guyana to Jagan's erstwhile partner, Forbes Burnham, and his breakaway People's National Congress, in 1966.

Jagan spent another two-and-a-half decades in the political wilderness, condemned to repeated electoral failure by vote-rigging and fraud. Then, a year ago, the first fair, internationally supervised general election took place. Jagan's PPP/Civic Alliance won 54 per cent of the vote, and he became president.

Nobody predicted the political stability and civil peace that have characterised the first 12 months of PPP/Civic government. After all, under Burnham and then, after his death in 1985, Desmond Hoyte, the PNC regime had consistently exploited Guyana's racial divisions, repeatedly mobilising the urban Afro-Guyanese minority against the descendants of the indentured workers who had been brought into the country's sugar plantations after the abolition of slavery. And Jagan's Marxist PPP was based on the predominantly rural, dispossessed East Indian majority.

Most observers imagined that PPP retribution and PNC resistance would be the order of the day. So far, that hasn't been the case. "History is now absolving us," says Jagan. "We are beginning once again from where we left off in 1953. Once again we have national unity, racial unity and working class unity. And we have the same aims—economic growth, social justice, and free and fair multiparty elections."

Not that there is any room for complacency. Guyanese novelist and social critic Jan Carew warns that not enough has been done to strengthen the coalition's multiracial profile. "After 28 years of discrimination it is inevitable that the government will be accused of Indianising Guyana," he says. "Of course, that is unfair. But visually PPP/Civic is indeed Indian and it is perceived as such by blacks. Jagan is a man without racial animus, but he must do more. He must at least balance the cabinet."

The new government's problems go deeper than image. "Twenty-eight years of one party rule have left a public sector full of placemen and corruption, an enormous external debt and economic and infrastructural chaos,"

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NEWS FROM ELSEWHERE

laments Clement Rohee, senior foreign minister. Now approaching US$3 billion, Guyana's debt represents the largest per capita burden in the world. Two-thirds of the country's foreign earnings is spent on the interest payments alone.

With tourism unlikely to provide much revenue—Guyana has a coastal belt of silt in lieu of a beach—Jagan's government is hungry for aid, debt relief and soft loans. The British government has cancelled several debts but Guyana's biggest creditors, the IMF and the World Bank, never agree write-offs and won't even trade indebtedness for environmental protection measures. As borrow or bust are the only choices available to the government, Guyana is still borrowing: most recently US$42 million for sea defences, US$49 million for port and road improvements and undisclosed but heavy sums for electrical plant.

Athough the government has dragged its feet on further privatisations, much of PPP/Civic's economic policy is a compulsory hand-me-down from the Hoyte administration. An economic recovery programme agreed with the IMF and the World Bank before the election has resulted in increased foreign reserves, controlled inflation, an annual growth rate of 7 per cent and the restoration of many old names to the Georgetown phonebook. Booker and Tate are back in town, running and recapitalising the sugar industry. Demerara Timbers, a major Anglo-Dutch logging operation, has got its hands on 1.2 million hectares of prime rainforest. Gold mining interests have been encouraged to suck the beds from the nation's rivers and the Canadian firm OMAI is planning the largest opencast goldmine in the world.

The next 12 months are crucial. The government must secure debt relief and soft loans to mitigate the impact of the recovery programme on its electorate, or its support will suffer. Following a period in which government has been the executive arm of the ruling party, it must also introduce a novel separation between party and state.

The government has moved too slowly on democratisation. The presidency, given draconian powers by Burnham, has not yet been redefined. A constitutional commission has been set up, but critics say that it is not independent. Jan Carew thinks there is nothing sinister going on: "Cheddi Jagan will never be a dictator. He comes out of a village tradition which is democratic and communal and this guides him more than ideology." But Ray Hendricks, an election organiser for the Working Peoples Alliance, the party of which the murdered historian Walter Rodney was a member, begs to differ: "In 1992 we wanted to take part in a government of national unity, a coalition that would have included progressive members of the PNC, but the PPP decided to go it alone. It wanted the power. Jagan behaved as if we were still in the era of one-man government and when he is at his most statesmanlike, he still does. I don't believe that's the way to introduce a culture of democracy in Guyana."

Kevin Davey

LETTER FROM AMERICA

The scale of the calamity and disgrace visited upon Bosnia and Herzegovina is only now becoming fully discernible. Worse, almost, than the well-attested massacres and rapes inflicted by Serbian and Croatian military and paramilitary forces are the increasing reports of sectarian conflict within the Bosnian camp. In this phase, Muslim gangsters have started to prey on the citizens of Sarajevo, and Muslim fundamentalists have begun talking as if a Bosnian equivalent of the Party of God may be in the offing.

For the secular and cosmopolitan forces that have resisted so long, this is perhaps the direst news of all. And it will gladden the hearts of all those who have falsely represented the war as a tribal one. In truth, though, the latest developments are the result of the policy of partition rather than a vindication of it. If the Nato powers had not subjected Bosnia to a heinous embargo on its own self-defence, then the infant republic and its nucleus of armed forces would have been the recipients of arms and training, and would have been able to put down the predatory militias. The logic of partition, however, is that it is the partitionists who get the weapons, and the outside indulgence.

In these circumstances, it seems almost pointless to keep non-military sanctions on Serbia, and there are already "humanitarian" noises being made about the awful impact that these have on ordinary citizens. But those who talk in this way should remember the responsibility of Slobodan Milosevic and his fellow fanatics in the cause of ethnic and religious purity, who brought this disaster on their own country and people. One who makes this point with some authority is the distinguished Serbian lawyer Srdja Popovic.

"I have always considered Slobodan Milosevic the greatest enemy of the Serb nation"

Popovic has been active since 1965 in the cause of democracy in what was Yugoslavia. In that year he defended a citizen imprisoned for starting an opposition party. In later trials he appeared for the defence of practically every dissident under the old regime, including some whose politics he found distasteful. He is the co-founder of *Vreme*, the only surviving opposition weekly in Belgrade. Recently, he gave an interview to *Borba* ("Struggle"), another Belgrade publication. An extract follows:

Popovic: "Sharpening the national rather than the class struggle" led not only to the breakup of Yugoslavia—to which many had already agreed, not realising that this would have been neither necessary nor reasonable if passions had not been so manipulatively aroused—but to a dangerous destabilisation of the whole Balkan area.

Borba: Is there anything to be added?

Popovic: I told them two years ago where Milosevic's policies were leading: to disintegration, war, international isolation, poverty. I have always considered Slobodan Milosevic the greatest enemy of the Serb nation, who has betrayed the interests of that nation—above all its interest in living in the same state—in order to remain in power.

Borba: About the letter [to President Clinton, calling for military intervention in Bosnia]. Would you sign that letter again?

Popovic: Of course I would sign it. I had no problem with the fact that, as you say, the letter was directed against the Serb side only—or rather, against Milosevic, Karadzic and above all Mladic, which to me is not the same, since I consider them to be war criminals, whereas the Serb people are impotent and guilty only of falling for their manipulation. A military intervention against the war criminals is a better option than the inappropriate sanctions with which people are being brutally punished for policies that they cannot influence. Not to speak of the fact that precisely those who make decisions—the regime—profit from sanctions, plundering the people in alliance with various criminals with whom they share the spoils.

Borba:Is there anything you wish to add?

Popovic: I want to add that I know perfectly well that Clinton does not wish to intervene in this Balkan mess. The area of former Yugoslavia is strategically quite insignificant, and Serbia today is *anus mundi*: not worth a single American life or indeed bullet. The attention that Serbia attracts in the media is, so to speak, perverse: the western media are fascinated only by the repulsiveness of the spectacle and the depth of the fall. For this is news: cannibals in the heart of Europe! The west does not possess the moral strength for anything better. . .

Popovic concluded by wishing, for his "own" government, "military defeat and imprisonment". This takes moral and physical nerve, as Karl Liebknecht and Willy Brandt both discovered when they insisted that "the main enemy is at home". But the honour of Serbia has in the meantime been saved by people like Popovic, who, with absolutely no western encouragement, have spoken out against military fascism.

I had a taste of how it feels to wish for the death or imprisonment of one's "own" leadership the other day, when Clinton quoted John Major as saying that "his" government would fall if the embargo on Bosnia were lifted. So that's what it was all about! Not a fear of widening the war or endangering the peace-keepers or any of the other crummy excuses, a fear for Major's own hide. I carry murder in my heart when I think of Bosnians—and Bosnia—dying in order that that mediocre non-entity, John Major, may continue to harvest the fruits of office.

Christopher Hitchins

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The bloodsports lobby is conducting a PR offensive to outfox its critics. **Nyta Mann** takes her mount with the Ludlow Hunt to see if it all makes scents

Not giving a fox for the sabbers

Luckily it had been raining all night, so I had a soft landing. It was years since my last encounter with a seaside donkey, and the borrowed horse I had been on knew it; just ten minutes into the Ludlow Hunt's regular weekend "meet", and I was already covered in freshly ploughed earth and seven shades of horse manure.

Every Saturday, the Ludlow Hunt gathers for the biggest of its thrice-weekly outings across the Shropshire countryside. First thing in the morning some 50 hunters, dressed in red or black hunting coats, some in top hats, assemble on their fidgeting horses in a large, brick stableyard, to exchange greetings and horsey smalltalk as glasses of port are offered round. With 30 tail-wagging bloodhounds weaving excitedly in and out of the throng, it looks like a Victorian Christmas card scene. The only 20th-century giveaway is a plate of chainstore sausage rolls following close behind the drinks tray.

The hunting fraternity is on a charm offensive. And exceedingly charming it is too, in an olde worlde sort of way, judging by Master of the Ludlow Foxhounds Bill Andrewes. Fifty-five years old and a keen hunter since the age of 15, Andrewes has the kind of manners so out of date that he is in danger of having a preservation order slapped on him: when I am lighting a cigarette, he gallantly snatches the matches from my hand so he can have the honour of doing it for me; he reverentially holds my coat open for me to get into it—leaving me flailing my arms about like a drowning fish in search of the sleeves; he ensures that he reaches any door first so that he can hold it open, and I end up turning the wrong way up the wrong corridor.

He is also a man with a mission. Andrewes is chairman of the Campaign for Hunting, the foxhunting public relations wing of the British Field Sports Society. The campaign was set up on his initiative in 1991, and the task he has undertaken with gusto is to spread the pro-hunting word to an increasingly anti-bloodsports public. He wants to give foxhunting a friendlier, less toff-like image.

To this end, Andrewes is keen to emphasise that everyone, from the rich man in his castle to the poor man at his gate, is equal on the field of the hunt. "There's no class on the hunt," he insists. "There is this image of the squirearchy, which the class warriors put about as well, but in reality all sorts of people take part and enjoy it. My goodness, there's even one huntmaster who's a lorry driver," he marvels. "A lorry driver!"

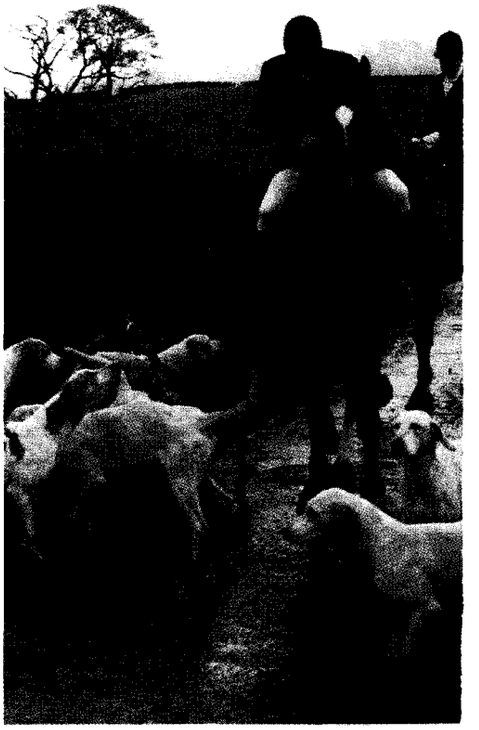
Trotting alongside the Ludlow redcoats this particular Saturday, I must have missed any lorry drivers present. Perhaps they were blending in too well; for all I knew, the plummily spoken duo that retrieved my horse, helped me back onto it and offered me a swig from their hipflasks, were gainfully employed in some form of heavy manual labour. "I say, you could have cleaned your breeches before you came," they quipped at the mud I was now wearing.

I caught up with the rest of the hunt, which was several fields away and waiting for the foxhounds to pick up the first scent. As the pack rooted around in the nearby trees and undergrowth, the hunters waited in silence. With the horses stamping the ground and steamy breath rising from their nostrils, it was a stereotypically English autumn morning. Then suddenly a horrible baying sound, like an army of mad doggy ghosts, rose up from across the fields as the foxhounds picked up the trail of the day's first quarry. Somewhere close by, a fox pricked up its ears.

Without so much as a "Tally ho!", we were off. A call on the huntmaster's hunting horn egged the dogs on. While the main bulk of the hunt clumped together, the lead hunters split into different directions in order to head off the fox, whichever way it might run. Strangely, now that the hunt actually had something to chase, it became peculiarly unstructured; there ensued a series of long periods spent meandering about on horseback interrupted by brief spurts of galloping.

"My goodness, there's even one huntmaster who's a lorry driver," he marvels. "A lorry driver!"

Few of the riders seem to know what's going on, or where the hunt is heading. Hardly anybody seems to have seen the fox, although I am assured that this is not at all unusual. "Oh, you seldom get to see it unless you're right at the front," I was told. "And even then, sometimes you don't. You just take their word for it that there actually is something out there." So what was the point of it all? "Just seeing the hounds at work is wonderful."



Clare Khaw

In dogged pursuit of their quarry (left) and hunting advocate Bill Andrewes (near right)

Andrewes is frank as to why he and his fellow redcoats engage in their chosen bloodsport (or "country" sport, as they insist on diplomatically calling it these days). "It's fun, that's why we do it." As simple as that. "The *reason* we hunt is because we enjoy it. But there is also the *justification*," he adds. The excuse he is referring to is the old one, that foxes are a pest and have to be controlled by some method or other. Foxhunting, he believes, is a fair contribution to this necessary culling.

Hunters emphatically deny the charge of cruelty. Foxhunting, they say, is one of the more humane ways to kill a wild fox, since shooting or snaring is far less "clean". And the prelude to the kill, the actual hunt itself, causes no great anxiety to the fox either. "The fox has no natural predators, so it doesn't *know* what it is to be hunted or that it is going to die. You'll see that when it's running from the hunt, it's quite unconcerned. And it quite easily runs faster than the hounds." According to anti-hunt campaigners, however, this is exactly why foxhunting is so cruel; foxes, unused to being chased and able to run quickly only in short bursts, find being chased particularly distressing.

Andrewes also dismisses the ethical distate for hunting, which sees something innately unpleasant in a gang of adults cantering

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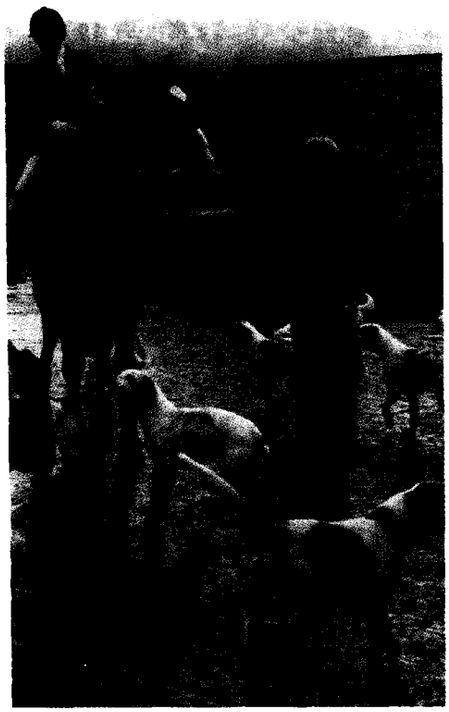

through rural Britain with a pack of dogs in pursuit of the death of one small animal. "That is a puritanical objection, which is fine if you wish to hold it. It is a matter of personal conscience whether you hunt or not. But you have to be *really sure* that something is a social evil before you legislate against it." He is happy enough, however, for hunt saboteurs to be legislated against, and he welcomes Home Secretary Michael Howard's contribution of a promised new criminal charge of obstructing or disrupting bloodsports. But then the hunters perceive the hunt saboteurs as a curious amalgam of new age traveller, Class War anarchist and violent lefty.

"It's an interesting coincidence," Andrewes confides, "that on the day of the poll tax riots, and then again on the day of the anti-racist march through south east London a few weeks ago, there was hardly a single incidence of sabbing across the south of England."

"It's interesting that on the day of the poll tax riots there was hardly a single incidence of sabbing"

But the Ludlow has only ever suffered from sabotage on one occasion, when a mere two sabs turned out to take on the entire hunt—and succeeded. The only disruption the hunt faces these days is the weather. At around 3pm, the Ludlow calls it a day. The rain is falling even harder, the light is deteriorating, and the fox has just escaped to safety up a mist-covered hill, so it's back to headquarters for the usual hunt post-mortem. This is held at the kennels over whiskey-laced tea in a Portakabin decorated with a fox-tail dangling from a window latch, cuttings of hunting news pinned to the wall, and a girlie calendar for the year 1992. It turned out that, in all, three foxes had been hunted that day, but all of them got away. Not up to the Ludlow hunt's usual one-in-three kill rate, but doubtless the average will be made up in time.

An honest and well-meaning man, Andrewes is passionately sincere in his conviction that hunting is an all-right thing to do. Back in the *Brideshead Revisited* setting of his comfortable country manor, he urges me to come up and hunt again. "I'm confident that if anybody is prepared to come and see for themselves, with an open mind, what hunting is really like, they will be convinced of our case. They'll see that it really is such an exhilarating sport, and come away with an entirely different view." I came, I saw, but I only came away with saddle-sores.

INFLUENCES

PADDY ASHDOWN
Leader of the Liberal Democratic Party

What books and authors have had the greatest influence on your political beliefs?
I especially like histories and autobiographies.

Name one film, one book, one play, one poem, and one song or piece of music that you would most like everyone to see, read or hear.
Film: Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves.*
Book: *Gaia* by James Lovelock.
Play: Shakespeare's *King Lear.*
Poem: "Dulce et Decorum est" by Wilfred Owen.
Song and music: The third of Strauss' four last songs, and any one of Beethoven's four late quartets.

In the early stages of your life, which figures stand out as an important influence on you?
My father, and the teacher who taught me history.

What event during your lifetime has had the greatest effect on your political beliefs?
Studying Chinese and serving with the Special Boat Service in Borneo. The first gave me an alternative viewpoint on our society and world, the second taught me that people's gifts, skills and courage are nothing to do with the accident of birth.

Which political figure—living or dead—do you most admire?
William Wilberforce and William Gladstone. Wilberforce because he pitted moral arguments against the vested interests and economic powers of his age—and won; Gladstone because he articulated best the commitment to liberty and internationalism, for which my party stands.

If you could visit any time in history for 24 hours, which would you choose?
Britain at the turn of the 18th century.

What do you consider the greatest threat at present to individual freedom and liberty?
The environmental threat and tribalism. The task of changing our pattern of life in order to save our environment is, I believe, the most difficult that confronts mankind; and the most potent threat to world peace in the next two decades will not be battles between nation states, but battles within and across their borders about tribalism, ethnicity and religion.

On important matters, whose opinion—other than your own—do you trust most?
Those of my close friends.

Who is the greatest prime minister we never had?
Jo Grimond. He was two decades ahead of his time; he had a clear vision where his contemporaries floundered, and he had powers of communication of the sort that we desperately lack among politicians today.

If you could pass one law, what would it be?
To decentralise power in Britain. I believe that Westminster has a cancerous grip on Britain, and the real powerhouse of ideas, commitment and imagination lies in individuals and communities.

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JOHN PILGER

Have a nice war in Disneyland

Washington

On Veterans' Day last week, the Walt Disney company announced it was building a new theme park near Washington, devoted to a "serious fun celebration" of American history. "This won't be a Pollyanna view of America," said Disney vice-president Robert Weiss. "We want to make you feel what it was like to be a slave. We want to make you a Civil War soldier. We're going for virtual reality. And, look, we'll be sensitive about the Vietnam war."

The Vietnam war, which was America's longest war, will be part of a permanent exhibition entitled "Victory Field". Just how the war will be "sensitively" depicted is not explained in Disney's handouts. Neither is there reference to other colonial wars and invasions, such as the assaults on civilian populations in Latin America, the Caribbean and the Philippines. These events are largely eradicated from primary and secondary education in the US, while the Vietnam "experience" is taught, if at all, as a costly, well-intentioned "mistake", even a "noble crusade".

The "cost" is frequently represented in mawkish, self-serving terms that concentrate on America as victim and the relatively few American casualties of the war (compared with the Vietnamese) and the fraudulent saga of Americans missing in action, which has been the device for maintaining an 18-year embargo against Vietnam. Hollywood, thankfully, has tired of Vietnam angst and moved on to other box office concerns, leaving the sustenance of myths to others.

Last Friday, the *Washington Post* devoted almost all of its front page to the Disney announcement and to a story headlined: "Our place for healing". This was the unveiling of a US$4 million Vietnam war women's memorial by Vice President Al Gore. "We never listened to the women's story," said Gore, "and we never properly thanked them. This memorial does that."

The bronze memorial shows three American women helping a wounded soldier. In fact, most of the women who served in Vietnam were seldom near the fighting, contrary to what is now being suggested. They were nurses, secretaries, clerks, air traffic controllers and intelligence analysts. Eight were killed in 15 years of war.

During the same period more than five million Vietnamese died, a disproportionate number of them women. These women died beneath a rain of American bombs and "anti-personnel" devices that made Vietnam a laboratory for the new technology of "civilian wars". They died in the paddies and fields, in fragile bunkers, trying to protect their children from the napalm that struck their villages in great blood-red bursts. In North Vietnam, they died in all-woman militias, courageously putting up a curtain of small arms fire as American F105s and Phantoms came in at 200 feet; and they died on hillsides such as Dong Loc, where I found the graves of the entire anti-aircraft battery, all young women . . . Vo Thi Than, aged 22, Duong Thi Than, aged 19. And they died in prison "tiger cages", tortured to death, and from drug overdoses in brothels and bars that served the invader.

And they are still dying from the effects of the American programme of defoliation, which was known as Operation Hades until it was changed to the friendlier Operation Ranch Hand, and which destroyed almost half the forests, and poisoned the earth and food chain. As a result of the chemicals used, countless Vietnamese women continue to give birth to babies without eyes and brains.

So Gore is right when he says "we never listened to the women's story". In America there is no "place for healing" for the women of Vietnam, just another reminder of how the historical truth can be manipulated in an open society. President Bush may have been right when he announced in 1991 that his "victory" in the Gulf had extinguished the "Vietnam syndrome", which is the euphemism for the deep misgivings of many Americans for what their government did in Vietnam. Certainly, there is no "Gulf syndrome"; the slaughter of 200,000 people, with technology developed in Vietnam, has disappeared into the appropriate memory hole.

I happened to be interviewing a former US government official, who served in south east Asia, the day after the Disney announcement and the memorial unveiling. A troubled man, he spoke about the killing of a third of the population of East Timor by the Indonesian dictatorship, which was armed and encouraged by the same Washington group responsible for the devastation of Vietnam; he mentioned Henry Kissinger's name a great deal. Looking out at the falling leaves in Connecticut Avenue, he said: "You know, I walk past these memorials and I think it's a real shame people are not aware that our dead are a fraction of those we killed or whose deaths we oversaw. This distance between myth, the big lie, and truth, is amazing to me, even after all these years."

There will be no tableau for East Timor is Disney's "Victory Field". And I doubt if El Salvador will be represented, even though the truth of what happened there—and is still happening—made a brief public appearance last week. Some 12,000 official documents, released under pressure from Congress, revealed that Presidents Reagan and Bush conspired with the tyrants running the death squads in El Salvador. Some 75,000 people were killed between 1980 and 1991, most of them murdered by death squads and by government "security forces", equipped, funded and often trained by the US. Today, El Salvador is said to be a United Nations "peace triumph". In fact, friends of Reagan and Bush are still running the death squads. In August, they killed 271 "suspected leftists". This is their contribution to the election next month, in which the left and popular forces have been persuaded by the UN to take part. President Clinton has promised to restore US$11 million in aid to the El Salvador regime.

Will the "sensitive" treatment of Vietnam by Disney extend to Operation Restore Hope in Somalia? The similarities are striking. The American "gunship" attacks on civilians are little different from Vietnam, where the helicopter "gunship" was developed as an effective means of "pacifying" people on the ground. And Clinton, who is said to have opposed the war in Vietnam, has strongly backed its rapacious echo in Somalia. Most of the dead are, of course, "local"—a Washington term. In Vietnam, they were known as "merelies", short for "merely gooks".

In the second half of the 20th century, the Vietnam war provides us with a unique historical context: it remains the touchstone for understanding modern imperialism. Those who were seduced into believing that George bush sent the Marines to Somalia for charitable purposes would have been spared their present disillusionment had they referred to the "saviour" role of the Marines in Vietnam in 1965. The places, personalities and immediate goals may change; the presumptions of power do not.

I think Disney should not be too "sensitive" in its approach to Vietnam. It should proclaim that the war was at least a partial victory for America. Most of the American objectives were met. Vietnam was physically ruined and the "virus" of its alternate development model stopped from spreading to the region. An American-led blockade forced the Vietnamese to all but abandon the gains of their system, such as universal health care and education, and to welcome the IMF and the World Bank, which are presently busy "restructuring" the country to fit into the "global economy". After half a century of repelling invaders, the Vietnamese now advertise themselves as "the cheapest labour in Asia". I have never quite understood why Hollywood failed to acknowledge this achievement. Surely, in the "virtual reality" of Disney's Victory Field, the time is right.

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SIDELINERS

Those preoccupied with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer seldom show interest in the rich who get poorer. A pity, because the recent relative impoverishment of the southern middle classes is the main basis for the wholesale desertion of the Conservative Party, largely to the Liberal Democrats.

Few will weep for the relative impoverishment of Paul Marland, the Tory MP for West Gloucestershire who resembles an older Alan B'stard, with a less charming self-regarding smile. Reported earlier to have lost £100,000 in Lloyds, insiders say it was more like £500,000. This seems confirmed by his having sold 800 acres of his 1,000-acre estate near Cheltenham.

There was little sympathy at Lloyds for Marland, because, after an initial stint with conservative syndicates after 1973, he complained his profits were inadequate and switched to the notoriously risky Gooda Walker syndicate, specialising in catastrophe re-insurance. His profits shot up for two years. But then, in 1988, came Piper Alpha plus hurricanes, changing lush profits into heavy losses. Instead of paying up promptly, he used his parliamentary position to make defamatory allegations and launch an erroneous early-day motion he felt compelled to withdraw. He also withdrew from Lloyds, saying: "I want to get out as fast as I can".

One would not expect the former PPS to Nicholas Ridley to abandon his Tory faith, which is of the anti-scrounger, anti-traveller, anti-union, pro-enterprise variety, with close links with the Selsdon Group and, formerly, with the Monday Club. He has defended big UK farmers against the smaller farmers of Germany and France. This is the base of his Euro-scepticism, which led him to sign most of the anti-Maastricht motions. His big-farmer Euro-scepticism puts him in the opposite camp to the Europhile Edwina Currie, whose resignation he helped to precipitate in December 1988.

Nor would one expect him to suddenly become sympathetic to the Liberal Democrats, whom he has fought most of his political life. He exploded against Gloucestershire's Liberal-Labour administration's "shameful record" last June, berating them for having piled up "horrendous debts" and forcing the government to cap them, after allowing them only a 1.8 per cent increase in financing. He urged the county to sell its 8,000 acres of agricultural land to pay off its debts.

He overlooked the fact that, in the previous month's council elections, not a single Tory councillor had been re-elected in his constituency. The election returned 30 Liberal Democrats, 20 Labour councillors and only 10 Conservatives. The Tories then voted to install a Labour chairman and vice-chairman of the council, showing whom the Tories consider the real enemy in the South. In his case the Liberal Democrats are the sort of people who block his great ambition, to "grow a crop of caravans".

Andrew Roth

EDWARD PEARCE

Life in politics often reflects art, but, the question is, by which author?

John Major admires Trollope. This is no sudden revelation. When I prepared *The Quiet Rise of John Major*, he gave me two long, courteous interviews and, coming to his car accident and year-long hospitalisation, he brightened and talked about the reading he did during convalescence: the whole of Jane Austen, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (much admired), dull but useful banking textbooks . . . and "about half" of Trollope with *The Small House at Allington* as favourite.

How far does actual politics compare with any political novel? We can't expect life in the Conservative Party, despite current bitterness, to equal Michael Dobb's brilliantly successful sequence. Michael understands that to achieve market impact, then to the mashed potatoes of politics, you must add not only tobasco and Spanish fly, but a soupçon of strychnine. The idea of Richard Ryder, as chores imposed on a conscientious Chief Whip, murdering Sir Timothy Bell and flinging Sarah Baxter from the roof of Parliament, lacks verisimilitude. (Actually in the text, Francis Urquhart lacks the final killer instinct towards a lady and is led away unmasked). A director's impulse changed that, making Ian Richardson a serial villain, a Tom Ripley of the committee room corridor; it may also signify a feminist triumph—chivalry is out!

The idea of Richard Ryder flinging Sarah Baxter from the roof of Parliament lacks verisimilitude

Even Trollope managed a murder in one of the Palisser (political) novels, the killing of the unpopular Mr Bonteen, president of the Board of Trade. This happens in *Phineas Redux*. Only an unwed pregnancy had disturbed its predecessor, *Phineas Finn*. We could manage that in contemporary politics. But any political novelist must decide between fidelity to the half-shaded manoeuvres and character play of real politics, and the sales-friendly homicide and criminal conspiracy which in skilled hands go so well.

Anthony Trollope would have enjoyed what we might call *The Noisy Fall of Margaret Thatcher*. Generally I distrust remarks about people's staring eyes; witness the cruel, wrong remarks about Tony Benn. But the Thatcher eyes, as lately seen in the series, would have been eschewed by Michael Dobbs as unrealistic. But the whole story of the poll tax was devised by a master of narrative fiction. It breaks into neat inter-connected sections. First, there is the Scottish prelude, with George Younger wringing his hands and asking for a solution, then come the innocent instruments of fate, Douglas Mason and the Adam Smith Institute.

Into this narrative must be fitted the sub-plot *Maggie's Friends*, with Kenneth Baker emerging to offer the most credible version of the tax, dual-running with phased down rates. At which point, we get the first climax, the interim high spot of the narrative when at conference a junior character, Gerry Malone, a Scottish Phineas, acts as catalyst by demanding instant legislation. In case attention should lapse, Nigel Lawson blossoms as a character, the anti-hero seeking to sabotage the whole plot by withholding funds. Then we broaden focus for the riots in 14 towns (interim climax number two) and set the scene for the long run-up to denouement: by-elections, Bournemouth conference and the sequence of "disloyal and treacherous" colleagues processing to Downing Street like the police coming for Tess. "The President of the Immortals had had his sport with Margaret."

Trollope, who had a touch of paperback interest himself, preferred suicides. In *The Prime Minister*, Ferdinand Lopez—"My father is a Portuguese gentleman" but we know he is a Jew—flings himself under a train at Watford Junction. Melmotte the Bondwasher (*The Way We Live Now*) also kills himself. Margaret Thatcher has opted wisely for haunting without the disagreeableness of being dead.

But it is in the church novels, altogether better books, that Trollope writes best about politics. Firstly, a rather better-bred version of Margaret Thatcher was sketched out in Mrs Proudie—could the superb Geraldine McEwen do the Baroness when they dramatise the book of the life?

But the struggles in the close at Barchester *are* politics? Shall Hiram's Hospital be closed, shall Archdeacon Grantly succeed his father as bishop, shall Mr Slope triumph? Would it be possible to write a novel now about parliamentary politics in the broad style of the church novels? It is quite a temptation.

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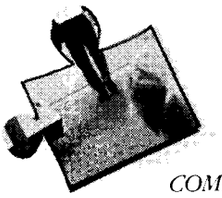

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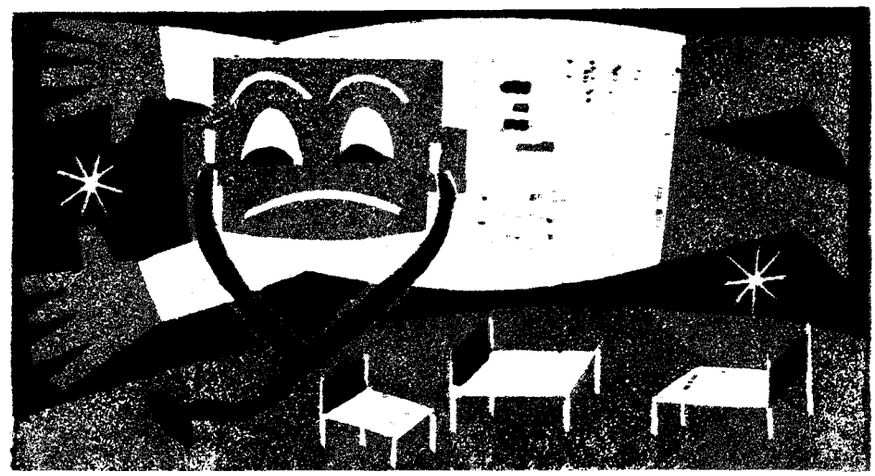

Hospitals are becoming more secretive, but **Kirsty Milne** was allowed into casualty at the Whittington, north London, to watch the shifts that pass in the night

Accidents will happen

It's his feet that are shocking. The man on the trolley has just had a heart attack in the street, so naturally he looks ill. He is hooked up to an electrocardiograph machine, and a tube protrudes from his plastic oxygen mask like a baby elephant's trunk. But the blocked arteries in his legs have turned his feet a livid purple; and an ulcer is oozing on his shin.

The patient—call him Mr O'Connor—lives rough. He is crochety from pain and confusion, and not too precise about where it hurts. But the young doctor trying to take his medical history calls him "Sir", and treats him for all the world as though a visiting dignitary had dropped into casualty for the day.

There wouldn't be much room for visiting dignitaries in the Whittington Hospital's accident and emergency department. There isn't an enormous amount of room for the doctors, who are crowded round a work station filling out forms. "Sometimes I feel like a glorified secretary," says Jeff Brammar, the young house physician, labelling yet another blood sample. "Even the simplest admission takes more than an hour."

Dr Brammar is part of the duty medical team "on take". With two other doctors, a registrar and a senior house officer, he will be on call for the next 24 hours, seeing patients in casualty and dealing with medical problems on the wards. To be "on take" means having your name written up on a noticeboard for everyone to see. It also means giving up your normal entitlement to sleep, and taking personal responsibility for a stream of north Londoners whose hearts and lungs threaten to give out at any moment.

Generally speaking, the doctors in casualty are half the age of their patients—an impression intensified by the presence of two eager-beaver medical students, from University College Hospital, who are shadowing the "take". But Dr Brammar, the house physician, is only 27. The senior house officer, Dr Cynthia Lee, is 26. The duty medical registrar, Dr Nimish Ganesh, has just turned 33—a positive greybeard in this company; and a figure of calm authority in a whirl of young men with stethoscopes.

When Dr Ganesh arrived in casualty at 9am, the wards were full. There wasn't a single empty bed he could have sent a patient to. Now, shortly after midday, someone has been discharged, freeing a bed for Mr O'Connor to go to. But there'll be a two-hour wait. Dr Ganesh puts the phone down, looking stern. "He should be getting proper coronary care on the ward, not faffing about in casualty."

More form-filling, mutual elbow-bashing, and borrowing of pens. The next patient for Dr Ganesh to see is a middle-aged woman who had a heart flutter 36 hours ago. She feels fine now, and looks sheepish. Her GP refused to visit her at home, but when she arrived at the surgery, he packed her off to the Whittington in an ambulance, saying he couldn't fix any other form of transport. Dr Ganesh, arranging for an ECG, sounds sceptical.

At this moment, the crash bleep goes, wowing in unmistakeable urgency. Dr Ganesh drops everything and tears down the corridor, white coat flying. He skids to a halt upstairs in one of the surgical wards. Dr Brammar is there ahead of him. In fact, there are too many people. The patient, a young woman, is alive, and her own doctor is present, so Dr Ganesh beats a tactical retreat. "Once you've seen that everything's under control, it's best not to clutter the place up." He returns to casualty more slowly than he left it.

Mr O'Connor, the heart attack patient, has climbed off his trolley, and is sitting upright in his cubicle. Dr Ganesh remonstrates with the staff nurse. She replies, her face like thunder, that the patient is being less than cooperative. "He's been on and off that trolley four times this morning. I don't know what else I can do." Dr Ganesh tries the "doctor's orders" approach, with some success. But Mr O'Connor seems agitated and upset. After more than two hours, the ward upstairs is still not ready to admit him.

Dr Ganesh examines a new arrival, a former heavy goods driver who is suffering from pains in his chest and jaw: classic symptoms of angina. "It's so bad I can't do anything," says the Irishman, grey and drawn. "I can't even make a cup of tea."

Suddenly a nurse in the next door cubicle calls out, and the crash bleep goes again. Mr O'Connor has stopped breathing. The entire casualty department seems to descend on him like a horde of lemmings. The curtains are drawn, but through them Dr Brammar can be seen hammering away at the patient's chest (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, familiar from episodes of *Casualty*).

Unbelievably, Mr O'Connor recovers consciousness almost at once, to general relief. Dr Ganesh waits to be sure that the drugs are working and the monitors are stable, then shoots off to the intensive therapy unit to find a bed. By comparison with casualty, ITU is horribly quiet. A girl sits at a bedside with her head sunk hopelessly on her arms. Behind their oxygen masks, the patients look fishlike and desperate.

The nurse manager is friendly but firm. She needs the one spare bed she has "for an aneurism I've got coming in". Delicate negotiations follow. Could she, asks Dr Ganesh, get in extra staff? There are unused ITU beds ("spare capacity") which could be opened up if specialist nurses were on hand. "Absolutely not," is the reply: the budget won't allow for it. A compromise is reached. Mr O'Connor will get his ITU bed, but not for long. He'll be moved soon afterwards to the general medical ward where he was meant to go in the first place. As a parting shot, the nurse manager warns Dr Ganesh "to think very carefully" about sending her any more patients.

Back in casualty, Dr Brammar is fretting about his lunch. The canteen closes at 1.50 pm, so the window of opportunity is narrow. Mr O'Connor was his third cardiac arrest this morning. "You don't get hardened, but you do get used to it. It can be upsetting if you relate to someone—if they remind you of your parents, for instance."

At 27, Dr Brammar is actually older than most house officers, having done a degree before starting medicine. He is contracted to work an 80-hour week, and earns £20,000 a year—a sum eaten into by debts from medical school. Being "on take" every four days means "no social life. You have to stay within the hospital grounds, and even when you're asleep you're worrying about whether the crash bleep will go off."

Dr Ganesh never makes it to lunch. He is examining X-rays of people's lungs, and giving off-the-cuff tuition to his team. They act as scouts, taking down a patient's symptoms and medical history in a process aptly known as "clerking". The case is then "presented" to Dr Ganesh. "And what does that make you think?" he prods, encouraging his junior doctors to ask relevant questions, and steering them towards a diagnosis.

Paul Schofield

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At 7pm, Dr Ganesh escapes to the canteen for supper. But his is now the most senior medical opinion available in the hospital, and his bleep goes off three times in the next 20 minutes. The third call is from an agitated anaesthetist in the theatre recovery room, where a post-operative patient is having difficulty breathing. Dr Ganesh, who wasn't warned about the man's condition, throws a resigned glance at his vegetable stew and gathers up his white coat.

The recovery room looks like the inside of a moonship. Patients toss and turn under rustling silver-foil covers, designed for warmth and known as "space blankets". Staff, wearing pyjama-style uniforms with green shower caps, clomp about in plastic clogs. The patient is not as ill as the anaesthetist feared, and can be moved to a ward. Cynthia Lee, the senior house officer, dons an apron and prepares to put in a catheter. "Inappropriate tasks," she breathes. "I spent a lot of my time as a house officer carting samples to the lab or chasing results. Nurses aren't allowed to take blood or put in a catheter—which is ridiculous, considering they're often more experienced than you are."

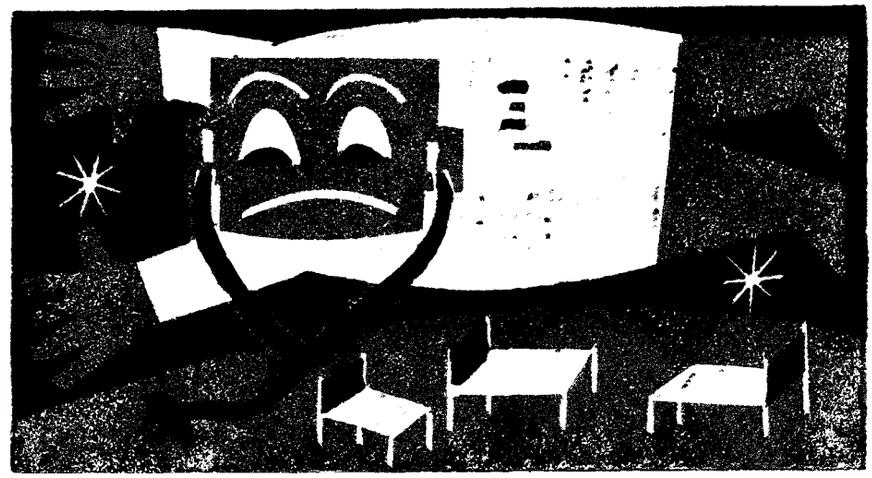
It's 9pm, and casualty is becoming slightly chaotic. Two broad-shouldered policemen are talking to a woman who thinks her purse has been stolen. The police are regulars. They bring inmates from Holloway and Pentonville prisons, both in the Whittington's north London catchment area; and they turn up after accidents and arrests. Joy Gardner, who died in August after police and immigration officers came to her home to deport her, was brought to the Whittington. So was Jonathan Zito, stabbed to death by a violent schizophrenic on a station platform in June.

On the ward, the patient from the recovery room is bringing up blood, "like Dracula" as the staff nurse graphically puts it. Dr Lee is called to do something about it. A flurry of nurses, newly arrived for the night shift, are having new patients pointed out to them. One is Mr O'Connor, still trying to struggle out of bed and sit on a chair. A glamorous male student nurse is asking him the same questions they asked in casualty this morning. Mr O'Connor is complaining about a pain in his ear, which no one seems to be interested in. "We'll do something about that," promises the nurse, "but the doctors thought your heart was more important than your ear".

A protesting Mr O'Connor is catheterised by Dr Lee. Dr Brammar bleeps her to say that they have missed the canteen's eclectic dinner hours. He is ordering a takeaway curry.

Dr Ganesh arrives on the ward to see Mr Nelson, a former postman characterised as "SOB" (short of breath). His condition was brought on by the stress of a burglary and a row with his schizophrenic partner. A heavy smoker, Mr Nelson takes an apocalyptic view of cigarettes. "The curse of mankind," he tells Dr Ganesh, who later hazards that 70 per cent of the patients he sees are suffering from smoking-related diseases.

As midnight approaches, casualty resounds with intermittent bleeps and wailing children. An old lady with suspected pneumonia, well into her 80s, is lying on a trolley crying: "I want my Mummy." There is nobody to stay and reassure her.



The atmosphere is getting stroppier. People occasionally accost a doctor to ask when they'll be seen. Dr Brammar apologises formally, and with considerable grace, to a woman who has waited for four hours. He wins her over by adding, "I was worth it, wasn't I?".

Dr Ganesh is newly married, but he will not see his wife this evening. Just after midnight, he heads for the doctors' mess, a reheated vegetable biryani, and a hospital bed. The two junior doctors are left to share night duty. The theory is that Dr Lee should sleep for a couple of hours. In practice, with four people waiting to be seen, Dr Brammar has to bleep her after 30 minutes. As he busies himself with an asthmatic, two police officers arrive, grappling with a little man who is wriggling like a weasel. Wildly drunk and aggressively jocular, he has taken an overdose but hasn't felt the effects yet. With an air of high camp, a heroic Glaswegian nurse draws on plastic gloves and prepares the stomach pump. Terrible gurgling sounds issue from the cubicle.

Dr Brammar escapes to the ward. The staff nurse has called him to look at a 33-year-old woman, suffering, unusually for her age, from angina. She looks terrified, gasping through her oxygen mask, and the print-out from her ECG shows an unusual heart rhythm. It is 4am, and Dr Brammar faces the big decision: should he wake his registrar? He ponders this ticklish question over a stray Murray Mint. "If you cry wolf too often, he won't come out when you really need him." But Dr Brammar, genuinely perplexed, resolves to get his superior out of bed. Inevitably, by the time Dr Ganesh arrives, the patient is looking much better, and Dr Brammar is ready to be told off. Fortunately, cardiology is the registrar's great love, and the patient's ECG results are sufficiently unusual to catch his interest.

Dr Brammar looks boss-eyed, but there are more patients to check up on. Not until 6am does he stagger through the chilly dark across the road to bed. His reward for working a 22-hour day is 90 minutes sleep. There's no overtime for working at night; on the contrary, he's on half pay, earning £3.15 an hour instead of £6.30.

Come 8.30am, Dr Brammar is to be found in the wake of the consultant's ward round, together with a bevy of doctors, nurses and medical students. Dr David Patterson, consultant physician and cardiologist, is not a man with a grand manner; but no one accompanied by such a train can avoid giving the appearance of a royal progress.

The ward round has its gratifying moments. Patients who could scarcely breathe last night have a good colour this morning. But there are still no spare beds. Two of the 12 patients admitted during the last 24 hours had to be inappropriately placed on surgical wards.

Managers and doctors, explains Dr Patterson, have different notions of efficiency. "Management want the hospital to be doing as much work as possible, which means making maximum use of beds. But from a doctor's point of view, to have more than 90 per cent of beds occupied is *inefficient*. It means we waste a lot of time on the phone trying to find beds. And it's harder to deal with sudden peaks in illness. I worry, for example, about how we'll cope with the flu epidemic we're hearing about." (More beds have since been opened to mop up some of the extra patients.)

The Whittington, which became a trust in April, stands to benefit from the effects of the "internal market" in London. A controversial plan being considered by Camden and Islington health authority would see patients diverted from UCH and sent to less expensive hospitals, of which the Whittington is one. It's a prospect that disturbs doctors such as Dr Patterson, who treats heart patients at UCH and the Middlesex as well as the Whittington. "I'm concerned about the isolated ethos that trust status has encouraged," he says, "and sad that the cooperation which used to exist between hospitals seems to have gone".

Dr Patterson's team are, understandably, not in the mood to take a strategic view. It's midday, and they are collapsing with mugs of coffee to contemplate life after "take". Dr Ganesh is off to give a lecture at another London hospital. Dr Lee faces a gruelling shift in the intensive therapy unit, which she's doing as a favour to a colleague. Dr Brammar, while hell-bent on an afternoon snooze, is determined to go drinking tonight. "Where there's beer, there's a house officer," he observes. After all, he is a junior doctor, with a reputation to keep up.

With the exception of the consultant, the names of all doctors and patients have been changed

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More than 6,000 nurses have left the NHS since 1986, while more than 20,000 administrators have joined. **Wendy Savage** relates a woeful saga of disorganisation

Will the NHS survive the operation?

In February 1990, the late David Widgery and I wrote a response for *NSS* to the glossily-produced white paper on health, misleadingly entitled, "Working for patients". We added a question mark to the title—and how right we were. Those who have benefited from this latest "reform" of the NHS (or, as Chris Ham, then working for the King's Fund, called it, "redisorganisation") are managers, accountants, businessmen who have taken on the contracted-out services or become trust chairmen, computer firms and private medical insurance companies. Patients are at the bottom of the pile, despite the government-inspired media hype about reductions in waiting lists and propaganda about the Patient's Charter.

What kind of patients' charter is it that concentrates on seeing people within 15 minutes in outpatients, then makes them wait months if they need surgery—only to have their operation cancelled at the last minute because there are no beds? What kind of government is it that washes its hands of all responsibility, saying, "We have delegated these decisions to local level, and it's up to your district health authority to decide how money is spent," when they have not allocated enough money for the needs of the population, let alone the "wants" fuelled by endless TV medical sagas and documentaries that look, out of context, at hi-tech medicine at its most successful?

Britain is almost bottom of the OECD league in health spending, whether measured per capita or as a proportion of GNP (see Table 1), although it does still have a higher proportion spent by government rather than privately. It is ironic that as the US looks toward more state involvement in health care (for reasons of efficiency as well as more equitable service provision), the British government seems hell-bent on destroying the NHS, while cloaking its privatising intentions in endless dishonest press releases about the "success" of trust hospitals, and the increase in "patient choice".

As an academic, and a working obstetrician and gynaecologist in a deprived inner London area, my experience of the NHS changes in the 16 years during which I have been a consultant has not been good. In the last three, they have been significantly worse.

In 1982, a massive administrative reorganisation of the NHS took place. Between regions and districts, there used to be another tier—area health authorities. They were disbanded. The idea was to cut back on bureaucracy and to streamline administration. Many administrators were indeed made redundant. Yet within two years the number of administrators employed in the NHS was virtually the same as before reorganisation. We never learnt how much the whole exercise had cost.

Then came the first whiff of business. Roy Griffiths, managing director of Sainsbury's, did a whistle-stop tour, decided that no-one was in charge, and, hey-presto, "general management" was the new experiment. The newly-appointed district administrators had to reapply for their old jobs, now renamed general managers, and another two years of upheaval took place. New blood was to be introduced, but the businessmen or army chaps who came in either resigned in disgust or quietly left as they saw what a difficult task it was to run a health service.

Then the new-style white paper arrived, complete with nattily-produced leaflets, videos and roadshows to convince NHS staff that their jobs were not at risk. After some hasty PR changes ("opted out" hospitals became "trusts"), the white paper rapidly became law, bypassing the usual green paper/consultation/white paper format for legislation, which, in the past, enabled concerned citizens to make their voices heard. In addition, the government was also imposing changes in the GP contract in the face of fierce opposition from the GPs themselves.

In my view, there are five major issues in the so-called NHS "reforms":

- The loss of focus on the individual patient and his or her needs, personal circumstances and choice.
- The imposition of a totally inappropriate "business model", with all its jargon, on a caring service, so that co-operation is replaced by competition.
- The loss of free speech, openness, accountability and what little democracy there was in the NHS.
- The chaos caused by repeated re-organisations of the NHS in the last decade, which have led to the loss of experienced staff, hard-won expertise and working relationships, and consequent demoralisation.
- The political manipulation of the service by PR techniques, the appointment of Conservative Party supporters, and the direct line management between the Secretary of State and trust chief executives and chairmen.

As a newly appointed consultant in 1977, I did not inherit a waiting list. Until this year, I never had one. Women seen in clinic were given a date for their operation there and then, so they tended to come in when scheduled, and my default rate was low. I had only cancelled a woman on the day of operation once in five years. Yet last December we were told that all operations on our booked lists were to be cancelled. The money had run out, and we could only do urgent operations. For three months, my team and I did less surgery than we wanted or were able to do, and less than we were being paid to do. Nurses were laid off, beds were reduced; three women were told that their operations had been cancelled on the day they were due to take place.

How much did this shambles cost the NHS? Multiplied by hundreds of hospitals (for the experience is a national one as the end of the financial year approaches), it must run to millions of wasted pounds—and thousands of distressed patients. Nine months later, we have just about got back to normal, but for how long? The end of the financial year is again approaching.

Other examples reflect the everyday reality

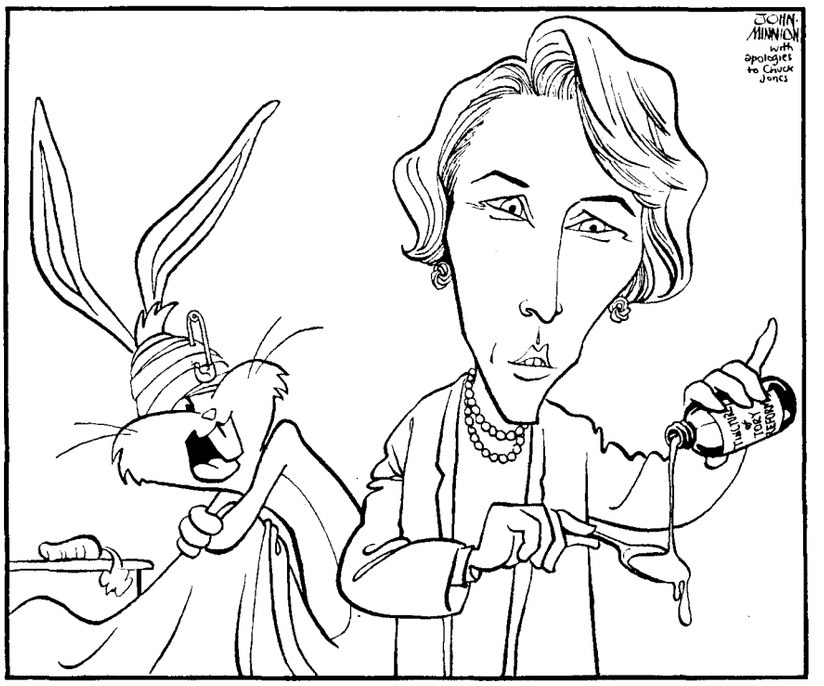

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Table 1: Health expenditure in selected countries 1980-90

	As % of GDP		Compound growth	Public as % of total		Per capita in US$	Spending compound growth (%)
	1980	1990	1980-90	1980	1990		
Canada	7.4	9.3	2.3	75	73	1770	8.6
France	7.6	8.8	1.6	79	74	1532	7.6
Germany	8.4	8.1	-0.4	75	73	1486	5.7
Japan	6.4	6.5	0.1	71	72	1171	8.1
UK	5.8	6.2	0.7	90	84	972	7.4
USA	9.2	12.1	2.7	42	42	2566	9.2
OECD average	7.0	7.6	0.8	76	74	1204	7.1

Source: "USA health care expenditure performance, an international comparison" Health Care Financing Review, 13, 1992

Table 2: Staffing and pay levels in the NHS, 1981-92

Year/category	1981	1986	1988	1991	1992
General/senior managers	0	510		13,338	
Salaries			29.6m	251.4m	383.8m
Admin/clerical	108,800	110,841	113,898	127,367	
Salaries			885.1m	1,187m	1383.4m
Nurses/midwives	319,766	402,690	403,883	396,136	
Salaries			3,920.5m	5,268.8m	5,771.5m
Doctors/dentists	40,993	43,248	44,749	48,567	
Salaries			1252.1m	1651.8m	1888.8m

From Health and Personal Social Services statistics for England, 1993

of the new, "reformed" NHS. One young woman was referred to me by a consultant in a different locality to the pelvic pain clinic I do with Professor Wingate. We booked her for a laparoscopy, but her health authority refused to pay, saying she could go to her local hospital. For reasons that seemed quite valid, she did not want to do this. Her father offered to use his savings to have it done privately, and would have done so had we not been able, by various bureaucratic devices, to get around the usual referral procedure. The referring consultant and I spent an hour or so filling in and dispatching the requisite forms, and I got the go-ahead 24 hours before her operation. Why should her hard-working father, a carpenter who has paid taxes all his life, have to pay because she wanted to travel five miles to be treated in our hospital?

In another case, one of our midwives wants to have surgery at the London Hospital. Her health authority says it has no contract with this hospital, and no money for extra contractual referrals. So much for patient choice or continuity of care. She had fainted at work, was found to be anaemic and was investigated by me. I know her and she trusts me—why should she have to go elsewhere and start all over again? Isn't that in itself inefficient?

My experience is supported by a BMA survey of consultants in September. Half had experienced contractual problems of this nature, and 20 per cent had been asked to stop carrying out "non-urgent" operations at the end of the last financial year.

It is true that the amount of money put into the NHS has been greater than that needed to keep pace with inflation, but has it been spent wisely? There was the scandal of the Wessex computer fiasco where £60 million was wasted. The West Midlands also spent millions on managerial perks and unauthorised expenditure. Contracts managers with no experience jumped on the gravy train and left with handsome payoffs when their inefficiency was noticed, often after disastrous agreements had been reached. How much do the expensively produced trust plans and reports cost? Are their facts any more accurate than the old plain, unillustrated ones were?

The number and cost of managers has increased phenomenally, as shown in Table 2. The remuneration of chairmen rose from £2.5 million in 1988 to £12.8 million in 1992. Spending on external laundry contracts rose from £11.4 to £20.9 million, at the same time that internal spending rose from £5.7 to £11.8 million. In 1992, for the first time, we saw £7.9 million spent on "health care assistants". Fine, if these barely-trained women are relieving nurses of non-nursing duties. But it would be a pity if the upgrading of State Enrolled Nurses to more highly qualified staff, to take account of the increasing complexity of nursing duties, were to be abandoned in favour of an even less skilled group of cheaper "nursing" staff.

The dismissal of Dr Helena Daly in Truro, whose hearing was held in secret and whose appeal would have been heard by those who made the charges against her, is an example of the unaccountability and secrecy under which trusts operate. Although Dr Helen Zeitlin, who talked about the inadequacy of nursing staffing levels and the effects on patient care, and Dr Chris Chapman, the biochemist who spoke up about contractual irregularities, did get their jobs back. Nurse Graham Pink, who blew the whistle on other health service malpractices, did not.

And if individuals cannot speak out, what about the bodies that are meant to provide some sort of accountability? Trust boards are slimmed-down assemblies of "safe" appointees; members rarely have any connection with the local community. Community health councils have lost what little influence they had. Even the health authorities themselves are being stripped of their powers and some are being abolished altogether.

It is not that I am against greater efficiency or the introduction of new ways of working for the good of patients. But I think that for some managers and health policy analysts, the whole climate of change is so exciting, as well as personally rewarding, and they are so far removed from patient care, that they do not see what is happening at the front line.

Had I been a reforming health secretary, the first thing I would have done would have been to set up the information systems needed to collect good data about costs, patient flows and differences in the numbers of nursing and medical personnel at hospitals around the country. I would then have selected a number of districts for innovative projects to compare different ways of achieving change, and monitored those changes for a number of years before embarking on another expensive and untested upheaval.

It may be that the split between the commissioners and providers of health care will turn out to be beneficial to patients, but this is almost an accidental gain of the new system. In the meantime, countless hours of medical nursing and managerial time are spent grappling with the consequences of under-funding, hospital amalgamations or closures, the unpicking of first wave trusts, the distortion of services by GP fundholders and attempts by health authorities to make a pint stretch into a quart of needs.

The NHS is not an industry. Health is also related to issues beyond the control of the NHS, such as employment, housing, diet and being part of a caring society. The public must wake up to what is happening to the NHS before the rapidly developing two-tier system becomes an insurance-based two-tier system with a safety net for the poor.

As David Widgery and I wrote in 1990, "We remain convinced that the majority of the population, including many people who voted Conservative in the last election, want an NHS which is humanitarian, efficient and compassionate, not price-tagged and dependent on market forces. We urge clearcut and united rejection of the white paper's proposals and philosophy." It is still not too late to call on the government to stop, take stock and revise some of the most damaging parts of its ill-thought out system, which is destroying a basically sound service.

Wendy Savage is senior lecturer and honorary consultant in obstetrics and gynaecology at the Royal London Hospital Trust

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Critics should be wary of heaping abuse on health service reforms. Patients may be getting a better deal, says **Julian Le Grand**

For better or worse?

Sally & Richard Greenhill

Nursing grievances: but could the reformed NHS really be better for everyone?

There is a curious division of opinion about the National Health Service reforms introduced by the government in 1991. If asked, most members of the public would describe them as a disaster. This perception is fuelled by an apparently endless series of "shroud-waving" stories in the media about emergency patients being denied treatment, hospitals being closed by heartless health authorities and the patients of GP fund-holders jumping the queue and getting preferential treatment.

On the other hand, many, perhaps most, health policy analysts, would view the reforms as a success. Being mainly academics, they would, of course, qualify any statement of approval, pointing to areas where there continue to be problems and where improvements need to be made. But if forced to choose between the new "quasi-market" NHS and the old "command-economy" one, they would unhesitatingly prefer the new.

Even the NHS itself is split. Managers of trusts are revelling in some of their new-found freedoms from bureaucratic direction. GP fund-holders are similarly enjoying their new powers. In contrast, some senior consultants, losing power to GPs on the one hand and managers on the other, are bitterly critical of the changes. Some GPs also resent what they see as the fund-holder juggernaut, forcing them to become service rationers rather than advocates for their patients. And there is a worry throughout the service that relationships based on professional ethics and patient trust are being replaced by a market ethos and a commercial culture.

In part, the government itself is to blame for the confusion. In the early days of the reforms, there was a deliberate policy to discourage the setting up of experiments or of proper monitoring systems to check progress. As a result, ministers now have little by way of hard evidence with which to rebut the stream of anecdotes putting the reforms in a bad light. Even the figures that are available, such as changes in waiting list times or in the numbers of patients treated, cannot be used to judge the reforms' progress, because of the large number of other changes that have been going on at the same time. Of particular significance, in each of the two years running up to the general election, there was an increase of around 6 per cent in real resources going into the NHS. With resource changes of that magnitude, it would be astonishing if there were no reductions in waiting lists or increases in patients treated.

So on what do some policy analysts base their view that the reforms have been a success? There have been a few empirical studies supported by independent organisations such as the Kings Fund; apart from these studies, analysts have had to rely on impressionistic evidence, although they can draw on a rather wider range of experience than simply the latest newspaper story.

These sources suggest that the reforms are working in a number of key areas. The split between purchasers and providers has given health authorities an opportunity partially to escape from the domination of the big hospital, enabling them to switch resources away from acute care and towards previously neglected areas as mental health and community services. More generally, they are now able to think about the requirements of a "health service" as distinct from a "health care" one. Also, the potential for competition between providers seems to be greater than originally thought and providers are behaving in an increasingly competitive fashion, with consequent benefits to purchasers. Driven by the information requirements of the quasi-market, costing procedures and other information systems are improving rapidly for both purchasers and providers. And cost sensitivity seems to be increasing throughout the service, with a consequent reduction in wasteful procedures and increased resource savings.

Most health policy analysts, if forced to choose between the old NHS and the new, would choose the new

Perhaps the biggest success story is the idea that was considered a marginal eccentricity at the beginning, but is now widely thought to be at the cutting edge of the reforms: the GP fund-holding scheme. The fact that fund-holding GPs now control the purse strings for some acute services has led to a real shift of power from hospital consultants and managers towards GPs—and so closer to the patient. Greater numbers of consultants are holding surgeries on GP premises. Pathology and other services are being provided more quickly and more cheaply. And fund-holders are better able to monitor the quality of care provided than the more distant health authorities, and hence are in a better position to bring errant hospitals to book.

Of course there is a downside. Costing and other aspects of running the market require extra administration. The accountability of both purchasers and providers to the local community as a whole is tenuous; health authority and trust boards are appointed, not elected, and fund-holders seem directly accountable to no one. Some health authorities find themselves, in one chief executive's words, "over a barrel" to their providers, having to accept an inefficient and expensive service because they cannot risk their local hospitals going bust. More generally, there is no "exit" strategy for dealing with failing hospitals. And, undeniably, there is a shift of culture—although if better patient care results that may not always be undesirable.

Nor is fund-holding without its problems. Fund-holders are arguably fostering a two-tier service, with their patients getting preferential treatment over the patients of non-fund-holders; they are also supposedly destabilising in their purchasing decisions and make proper planning difficult. Some of the scheme's early successes may be due to the fact that the first fund-holders were among the more dynamic GP practices. And there is the ever-present danger of cream-skimming: fundholders and others selecting patients for treatment on the basis of their cheapness to treat, not on the basis of need.

But even these concerns have to be considered with care. For instance, it is not obvious why dealing with fund-holders makes it more difficult for providers to plan their service provision than dealing with a purchasing authority. Central planning was not a conspicuous success in the old health service; decentralised sources of information close to local needs, like GP fund-holders, may provide a better base for long-term decisions than a centralised planning agency. Indeed, other capital or skill-intensive markets (cars, computer software, aeroplanes) operate without

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centralised planning. Is medical care different?

Partly because fund-holders do not have to bear the cost of treatment exceeding £5,000, there is no evidence of cream-skimming at the moment. Even if it does emerge as a problem in the future, there are various mechanisms for dealing with it, including adjusting the relevant funding formulas so as properly to allow for expensive treatments. And the two-tier problem is a transitional one, which will disappear if and when all GPs, singly or in groups, become fund-holders.

All this puts the opposition parties in something of a dilemma. If they refuse to believe that there are positive features of the reforms, they can call for their complete withdrawal. But then they have to offer something else that would do better, and it is far from clear what that would be. Certainly few who work in the NHS would want to go back to the old pre-reform system. And even fewer would relish the prospect of yet another dramatic upheaval, regardless of what form it took.

The best strategy for the opposition is probably to work with the grain of the reforms, but to try to offer proposals to deal with their very real deficiencies. So, for example, to overcome the "over a barrel" and the two-tier service problem, they could support the extension of GP fund-holding to cover all GPs and a wider range of services. Smaller GP practices could group together to form multi-funds of the kind already established in Kingston and Richmond. This would be consistent with the commitment of bringing decisions closer to the patients, and hence with the general theme of user-empowerment that all political parties increasingly espouse.

To deal with the accountability issue, fund-holders could be made directly accountable to the health authority, which would control their funding arrangements: and the health authority itself could be elected. The health authority might also retain the power to purchase some specialist services if it was not thought appropriate to support these through purchasing by GP fund-holders.

To overcome both the failing hospital and the monopoly problems, schemes for franchising could be considered, where the state retains (or regains) ownership of hospital assets, but puts the management of those assets out to competitive tender. Competition *in* a market would thus be replaced by competition *for* a market.

Finally, a note of political caution. The opposition parties should resist the temptation to engage in too much shroud-waving themselves. This can easily backfire—witness the Jennifer's ear debacle. More seriously, they may thereby lock themselves into a position of unthinking opposition to changes that may look more and more successful as further evidence emerges. Any gain in short-term political advantage may be at the expense of long-term embarrassment and, worse, a weakened National Health Service.

Julian Le Grand is the Richard Titmuss professor of health policy at the London School of Economics and a professorial fellow of the Kings Fund Institute

Labour health spokesperson David Blunkett will reply to this article next week

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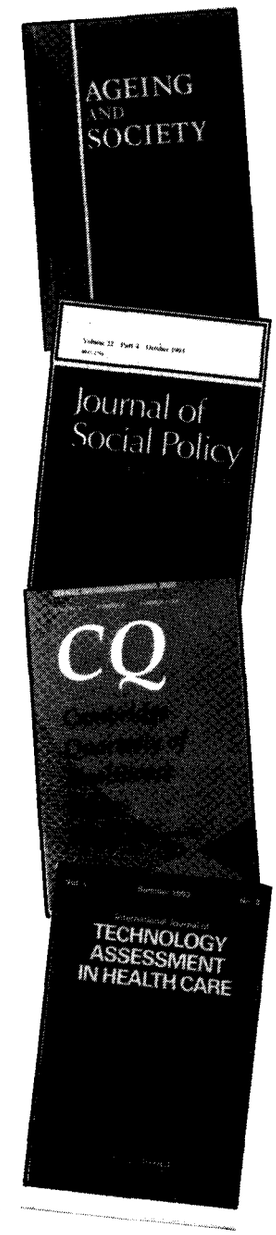

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Kurdish struggles in Iraq and Turkey still make the news. But few journalists have entered Kurdish Iran since 1980. **Gareth Smyth** discovers a forgotten war

Guerillas in the mist

With good reason the Kurds call their fighters *peshmerga*—"those who face death". As we walk at night for up to ten hours, we often pass less than a kilometre from Iranian military camps whose spotlights punctuate the darkness. Every sound—crickets, a snapping twig—seems loud. The last in line trails a branch to disguise the tracks, and we walk backwards across dusty roads to leave misleading footprints.

We sleep outside, often in a gorge under walnut trees. By afternoon we feel more relaxed, as we drink upstream and wash downstream. Kerim poses by his BKC which, with its bullets, weighs 22 kilos. Even for an athletic 23-year-old it is a heavy gun to carry at night around treacherous, rocky terrain.

Iqbal, just 19, is making his first trip as a sniper. His elderly rifle has a plastic hood round the precious telescopic sight. At first they seem shy, but these young men are a far cry from the western image of helpless, hopeless Kurds. The guerillas of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI) are gaining confidence.

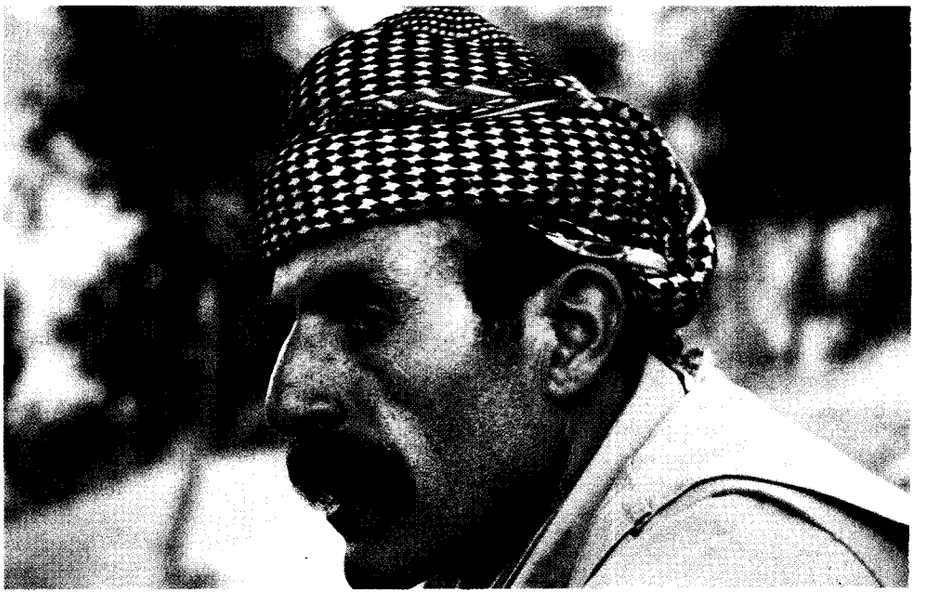
They have survived, and are fighting back. It is 13 years since Ayatollah Khomeini launched a jihad (holy war) against Iran's estimated five to eight million Kurds. The Islamic Republic denies any autonomy, and imposes the Farsi language throughout education. Iran's news blackout has ensured that this large-scale, shadowy conflict is unknown in the outside world. The only way in for a reporter is by foot over the mountainous border with northern Iraq, across country still mined from the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

As we walk, Sa'ed Brayhim, 42-year-old KDPI commander for the Baneh region, combines an almost aristocratic air with a complete lack of pomposity, clasping his hands loosely behind his tall back as he glides up steep slopes, occasionally pausing to peer through his binoculars. If the Iranian authorities realise a western journalist is here, says Brayhim, they will spare no effort to find us. We will tell villagers I am an Afghan called Sayid who speaks English.

We move into villages in the late afternoon, once confident we have not been detected. Women offer food for tonight and for tomorrow and listen at the door of the main room as the men talk and eat with the peshmerga. Kalashnikovs and a SAM missile lean tidily against the wall. Brayhim's reputation precedes him and he is treated with reverence. Most of the children have seen peshmerga before. "They are looking for Khomeini's guards to fight them," a seven-year-old tells me. There are 200,000 Iranian troops in Kurdistan. Even from a fairly low vantage point it is easy at night to see the lights of four or five military positions. But the peshmerga claim that the *pasdaran* (revolutionary guards) have lost the will to fight.

"Once they hung pictures of the Ayatollah on their chests and wore headbands as a symbol of Hussein (a seventh-century Shia martyr), but few do that now," says Brayhim. Rather than fight at close quarters, the pasdaran use artillery, mortars and helicopters.

The shelling is imprecise and kills civilians. Bagy Kazy, a hamlet 30 kilometres southwest of Baneh city, has been abandoned by terrified residents. Recent signs of habitation



Gareth Smyth

—hay in cattle pens, abandoned pots—testify to their rapid departure.

Azad is 23, newly married and scared. Two weeks ago a shell exploded across the remote valley where he and his five brothers farm. The boom of artillery echoes daily round the mountains. Azad says he knows more than 20 villagers who have been killed since March.

"There is no fixed time," says his wife, cradling her sister-in-law's baby. "Sometimes the shelling lasts 10 hours, sometimes 15 minutes. The children cry. We always feel in danger." Fear permeates. Villagers are frightened of the shelling, frightened of the pasdaran. Many refuse to be photographed for fear the authorities will think they support the peshmerga.

Above Azad's door hang pictures of Iran's President Rafsanjani, its spiritual leader Ayatollah Khameini and the late Ayatollah Khomeini. "When the pasdaran see these, they won't harm us," he explains. But as we sit within the mud-baked walls of Azad's house a helicopter buzzes over. "They know we are in the area", says Brayhim. In a nearby village Hassan—a brash trader—poses for a photograph with his son. "Many people told us that, if the Shah was overthrown, a democratic government would come and give rights to the Kurds," he says. "But people suffer very much from the new regime. You must not talk about politics—people who talk about politics lose their lives."

Ali Azizi, second-in-command of our 40-strong guerilla group, smiles when I say he looks older than his 35 years. He is easy-going, broad, with steely, blue eyes. He grew up in Baneh city and, like many Kurds, began work as a building labourer. He welcomed the Shah's demise in 1979 with youthful enthusiasm—"The first six months were very happy. We were all excited to see the Shah run away. But then came Khomeini's jihad. President Bani-Sadr said—"Don't take off your shoes until you kill all the Kurds".

Peshmerga commander Sa'ed Brayhim (above), mountain guerillas prepare to fight the Iranian pasdaran (top right) and glade runners from the peshmerga (bottom right)

Ali chose to fight, and trained in one of the KDPI camps, then inside Iran. "We shot down Phantoms and helicopters, but the pasdaran captured Baneh," he recalls. He went underground, but was arrested in 1982. He was beaten with cables and given electric shock. His torturers dug out his toe-nails. Today the nails have no roots, and scars remain where the pincers tore the flesh. "I didn't confess," he says. "I knew that if I did they would torture me more."

"Four friends were killed outside my cell. Narsari, who I'd known for ten years, was 25, a maths teacher with a high-pitched voice. Mohammed, from Benechwi village, was 50 with four children. They buried him clothed in the prison, and took money from his family for the bullets used to kill him. After 40 days his relatives were allowed to rebury him according to Islamic law".

Ali was lucky. After being sentenced to death, he and two others clambered over a

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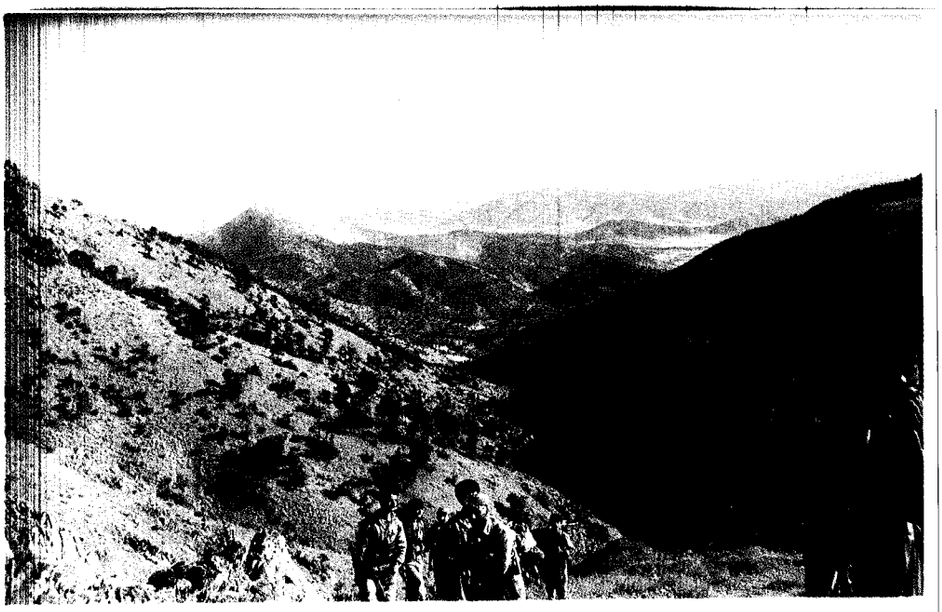

perimeter wall. It was so unlikely an escape, that when he joined the peshmerga he had trouble convincing them of his story. Ali has other scars. Every year his head is X-rayed at Sulaimaniyah hospital in northern Iraq to track the possible movement of grenade shrapnel lodged near his brain. His leg is gouged from heavy machine-gun fire. On the occasions of both injuries he was taken by horse over the border to a KDPI hospital. Each trip took two days, with no morphine and only tablets to stem bleeding. Most peshmerga are single and laugh, embarrassed, when I suggest girls might find them glamorous. Ali is unusual: at the late age of 27 he married. "I met Peri in a village we visited," he says. He has never met a journalist and is puzzled why I ask about him. I press on. Hasn't he had enough? Wouldn't he rather be with his family than in the mountains? Why go through all this just to be able to speak Kurdish?

"It is not just language, but culture, the right to sing, the right to dance. The people of Baneh want to elect their own mayor. At the end of the 20th century, in a rich country like Iran, you have seen just one school. There are perhaps four factories in all Kurdistan. No Kurds are in positions of authority. I want to talk with my tongue, not with my Kalashnikov. We are not terrorists. The Iranian authorities are trying to provoke us to commit crimes like them. But we are not like them. When we take prisoners we kiss them, treat them well and let them return home."

In escalating its campaign, the KDPI draws strength from bases in northern Iraq made possible by the emergence in 1991 of "free Kurdistan" with de facto independence from Baghdad. The self-government of three million Iraqi Kurds, who elected their own parliament last year, fans the aspirations of Kurds in Iran. Relations between Tehran and the Iraqi Kurdish authorities are worsening. Iran issues warnings about the "godless and morally corrupt" situation in Iraqi Kurdistan, and its troops regularly cross the border. In July, pasdaran dynamited a school at Kanaro. In August, the KDPI moved its headquarters from Bollay to Koisanjaq, 60 kilometres from the border and beyond the range of Iranian artillery. Antiquated anti-aircraft batteries at Koisanjaq reflect the fear of a repeat of March's bombing of Bollay when Iranian jets killed three and destroyed the KDPI hospital.

There are no casualty figures for the conflict between the peshmerga and Iranian forces. Tehran says nothing. The KDPI downplays the importance of its bases in Iraqi Kurdistan and insists its primary work in Iran is organisational, not military. But Mustapha Hijri, the KDPI's 48-year-old leader, admits that over 5,000 peshmerga have been killed since 1980. He says "more than 50" Iranian troops have been killed in the past four months, but other peshmerga and KDPI radio claim a higher figure.

Both Hijri's predecessors were assassinated, probably by the hand of Tehran—Qassemlou in Vienna in 1989 and Sherefkindi in Berlin in 1992. One of Hijri's bodyguards was killed this year when a bomb aimed for the KDPI leader blew up the car in front.

Hijri believes the struggle is tilting in the Kurds' favour. "Fighting will increase because the regime's troops are tired after these long years," he says. "We will carry out more attacks, and we will win." Among Iran's bugbears is the inspirational Kurdish radio and television beamed into Iran from "free Kurdistan" and offering a blend of news, views and music. One 60-year-old villager near Baneh, whose son was recently arrested for grazing sheep near a military outpost, tunes in a battered wireless kept in pride of place below a sepia photograph of his father. "I don't like Tehran radio, I want a programme in my own language," he says. "Life was better under the Shah," he insists. "It's not Islam. What kind of Islam is this?"

This opinion is general. The lowly state of the Iranian economy, with high unemployment and inflation, following March's devaluation of the rial, has hit the Kurds hard, and compounds the sense of discrimination in one of the poorest parts of Iran. A woman who says she is "maybe 56", with eight children between 20 and 44, sits in a dirty white shawl cradling a grandchild. Just one of her children still lives in the village. She worries about her youngest daughter: "Life was happier when I was her age. Everything has become very expensive."

The day I, my interpreter and six peshmerga set off for Iraq, we are jolted by the rise and fall of Iranian mortar fire. It is a tough journey, even on horseback, over mountains 8,000 feet high. When we ask at a house for food, a villager slips the safety catch off his Kalashnikov but, even after 45 minutes' sleep by a cold road-side, it is good to be in the relative safety of early morning Iraq.

Later the next day, I track down Ali's wife in Sulaimaniyah. Peri remembers the day she met Ali. "I was 16. The peshmerga came to my father's home in Karshan village in Iran. The second time Ali saw me, he said: 'I am a peshmerga, always in the mountains, but I love you. Will you marry me?' I said yes." Three months later, they married in a village where there were no Iranian soldiers. "It was a simple ceremony at five o'clock in the afternoon. Ali's parents were in Baneh. We couldn't invite anyone, just the peshmerga."

Peri has no regrets. "I miss him when he's away, but I am learning to read and write Kurdish, and we have four children. Even though it's difficult, I am convinced we must seek justice." Their three-year-old daughter Tara is a precocious child with an attractive smile. I ask her where her father is. "He is in the Iran area, walking around." I tell Peri that Ali has promised that Tara will one day pour me tea in Baneh. "Insha' Allah," she says softly, a tear in her eye.

The names of the villagers have been changed to protect them

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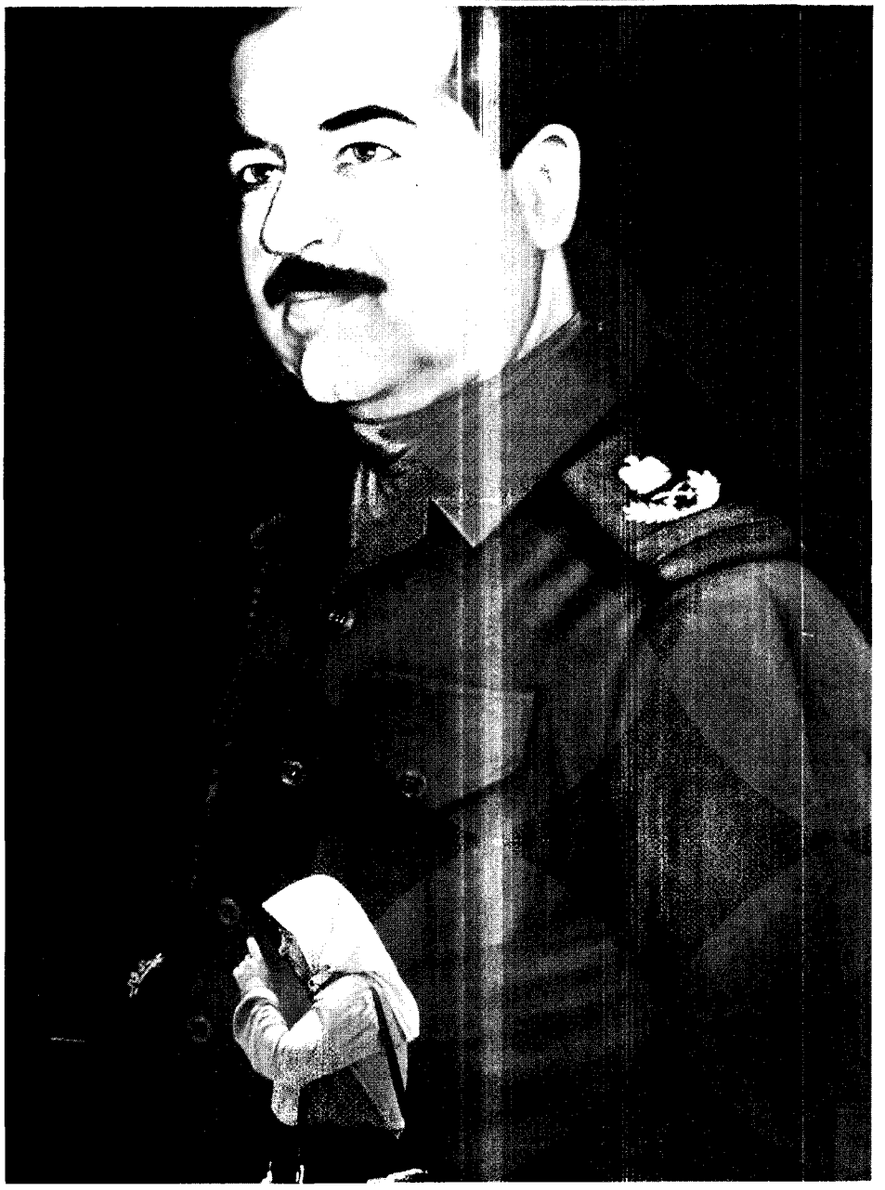

The omnipresent Saddam Hussein now seeks total extermination of the marshland Shi'ites

Shi'ite children choke, turn blue and die from Saddam's poison gas. But the media has moved on and with it the world's manipulated ability to care, writes **Julie Flint**

Turning away from genocide

Had it been 1991, or even 1992, politicians on both sides of the Atlantic would have raged about it, television would have led with it, newpapers would have headlined it "Saddam Gasses Shi'ites".

But it is 1993, Saddam Hussein has lost control, for the moment, of Iraq's Kurdish north and is constrained by the cameras of Allied planes overseeing the no-fly zone in the Shi'ite south. He can—and does—hurt his own people, but he cannot invade Kuwait or Scud Israel.

Small matter then, cynics might say, that he may have used chemical weapons in the marshlands of southern Iraq. Are the marsh rebels not "Iran-backed"? Is this not an "internal" matter?

It is difficult not to be cynical. Two years ago, the mere whisper of chemical weapons would have had the United Nations burning the candle at both ends. Reports of children choking, turning blue and dying would have been on every front page. Evidence? Evidence didn't matter then. And when it did, in the killing frenzy of the Gulf war, it was fabricated. Remember the threat—that never was—to Saudi Arabia? The chemical stockpiles that—supposedly—reinforced every front line when we were intent on defending Kuwait's oil, Saudi Arabia's peace of mind and our own, tarnished honour.

In 1993 there is evidence. And there has been for almost two months. But only this week is the United Nations beginning to investigate. Not in the right place as yet, but at least in the right direction.

The first suggestion that Saddam used chemical weapons in the Hammar marshes came early in October from the Supreme Council for the Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), a Shi'ite opposition group whose pronouncements, coming as they do from Tehran, are almost routinely disregarded. It was not until Emma Nicholson echoed them that they began to receive the attention they deserved.

Now there are videotaped interviews with eyewitnesses, documents faxed from Tehran naming the chemical agent, but few headlines, despite a remarkably detailed and consistent story that leaves little doubt that chemical weapons have been fired for the first time since the Kurds were chemically massacred in 1988.

Threats of chemical warfare in the marshes began to be heard some three months ago, after defence minister Ali Hassan al-Magid was appointed acting governor of Basra province and charged with ending the lingering insurgency in the marshes, an age-old refuge for bandits and rebels, and the preferred hiding place for Shi'ites fleeing Saddam's wrath after the failure of the popular uprising that followed the Gulf war.

With the Amara marshes successfully drained and government control consolidated, al-Magid concentrated on the Hammar marshes, the new focus of rebel activity. Tribal leaders were warned that opposition would be punished with chemical weapons.

But the resistance ignored the warnings—even though they came from the "Chemical Ali" who masterminded the campaign against the Kurds—and in the second half of September killed more than a dozen soldiers in a single attack, according to reliable western sources. Army morale, already low, fell still lower.

At 8.15 am on 26 September, units from the 51st Division attacked two locations on the eastern edge of the Hammar marshes, one of which had been used as a rebel stronghold ever since flooding forced civilians to flee. Testimony from survivors who reached Iran, three days' walk away, has permitted a reconstruction of the day-long battle.

In the first attack, the army fired mortars that exploded with little noise and emitted white smoke. The smoke appeared to have little effect over water but was lethal over dry ground, causing choking and collapse. Some eyewitnesses also mention blisters. The rebels counter-attacked, capturing six armoured vehicles and a number of shells.

The army attacked a second time, without the strange gas, and was again repulsed. It attacked a third time, with the gas. As night fell, the resistance ran out of ammunition and resorted to captured weaponry—including gas shells. Large numbers of soldiers fell, showing no wounds.

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All eyewitnesses agree that the Iraqis carried gas masks and filters on straps that ran from shoulder to belt. Most say they were not wearing them. The initial reports, and the fears of chemical warfare, were borne out by documents found in one of the captured vehicles. Among some papers, which may now be in Iranian hands, was a notebook summarising the instructions given to commanders at a briefing before the attack. One of the 18 points listed refers to the need to infiltrate spies, another to the preparation of armoured vehicles. Four mention chemical weapons:

"2. A chemical attack is to be considered during battle . . . 5. We will hit with the chemical K80 . . . 6. Gas masks will be fixed to the belt in battle . . . 15. A card concerning the agent phosgene should be issued to every soldier."

Phosgene, a basic chemical building block with many legitimate industrial uses, was first used for military purposes by the German army during the first world war. A choking gas, it affects the deepest part of the lungs and causes death by suffocation. "If you get up and run, there are major problems," says Dr Allistair Hay, senior lecturer in chemical pathology at Leeds University. "Rest is mandatory. There is no way blood tests can detect phosgene and I very much doubt anything can be found by soil tests. It breaks down on contact with water. Like tear gas, it is good for getting people out of entrenched positions. Unlike tear gas, it kills."

Seven weeks after the attack, UN inspectors finally travelled to southern Iran this week to question refugees. If they believe further investigation is warranted, they will seek access to the marshes from Baghdad.

Nothing short of on-the-spot investigation will prove—or disprove—reports that are now too detailed, and too consistent, to be ignored. Injured civilians have not been able to reach Iran because of the distance and the heavy Iraqi military presence. Interviews will provide nothing more than a weight of evidence. But, says Dr Hay, "if you get to the right place, you can find your evidence even many years later—particularly if you can get into a bomb crater and collect a fragment."

Saddam Hussein is once again on the offensive within his own borders. Reliable reports suggest that hundreds of prisoners, most of them Shi'ites, have been executed in the last three months. Ground-to-ground missiles have been fired in manoeuvres for the first time since the war. Iraq's miltary machine is being rebuilt.

"Saddam feels he has some kind of green light from the western powers," says Dr Hussein Shahristani, the nuclear scientist held in solitary confinement for 10 years for refusing war work. "He has been encouraged to use chemical weapons because nobody talked about the drainage of the marshes. Saddam understands these messages very well."

Since the Gulf war ended, Saddam has ravaged the Shi'ite's holy cities, destroyed their centres of learning, killed and imprisoned their clerics. Marsh Arabs have been dried out, driven out, bombed and burned. All this has been permitted. Journalists, international observers and others have, literally, moved on since 1991, and with them the world's manipulated ability to care. Is it not time for their return?

The Scott Inquiry into arms sales to Iraq needs to look at corruption in the military exports business, says **Patrick Fitzgerald**

Graft excluder

The Scott Inquiry's attitude towards graft in the matter of arms sales to Iraq is not entirely clear. But several developments in recent months have reinforced the perception of systematic corruption in British arms dealing. Should Scott fail to address this aspect of the Iraq traffic, his inquiry will surely be found wanting.

The conviction last month of Gordon Foxley, the former head of ammunition purchasing at the MoD, for corruption was just the most spectacular recent blow to the arms business's image. Foxley received £1.5 million in kickbacks from German and Italian defence contractors in exchange for re-assigning orders previously lodged with the British Aerospace subsidiary Royal Ordnance. One unidentified source commented to the press that the MoD was reckoned to be "among the most corrupt in Europe". While Royal Ordnance reckoned that hundreds of jobs may have been lost as a direct result of Foxley's activities, it has undoubtedly benefitted from the cosiness of its relationship with the MoD. Under the 1988 Explosives, Propellants and Related Products (EPREP) agreement, it was guaranteed at least 80 per cent of the MoD's annual ammunition procurement, now running at £500 million annually, over a five-year period (recently extended to 1995).

The Scott inquiry encountered another illustration of MoD/BAe mutuality in the last week of October. Back on the stand for a fourth day of questioning was Ian MacDonald, boss since 1986 of the MoD's Defence Export Sales Secretariat. Scott wanted an explanation of why a BAe sales executive on secondment to the MoD, David Hastie, had visited the 1989 Baghdad Military Fair when the Foreign Office had advised that no-one from the MoD should attend. Hastie was there to pursue a possible £5 billion deal to supply Hawk jet trainers to the Iraqis. Moreover, when Tony Banks MP asked Alan Clark in 1991 whether any MoD official had been there, Clark replied in the negative. How could this be, when Hastie's secondment to the Defence Export Sales Organisation had been confirmed by the Civil Service Commission only a few days earlier?

The answer was a master manoeuvre: the permanently revolving door. As soon as Hastie boarded the aircraft for Baghdad, he was temporarily re-seconded by the MoD back to British Aerospace; and once his return flight landed on British soil, his allegiance just as suddenly reverted to the MoD. Thus Hastie's spell in Iraq was spent, not as "business development adviser" to the MoD, but as a sales rep for BAe. Most important of all, Parliament was told the truth. Even MacDonald had the grace to describe this absurdity as "embarrassing".

Hastie's boss at DESO was another BAe man, Sir Colin Chandler, who had supervised the Al Yamamah and Malaysia deals. On this occasion, their efforts with the Iraqis were in vain, as Margaret Thatcher uncharacteristically cancelled the Hawk deal.

Returning to the ammunition side of things, one company that certainly appears to have lost out from the EPREP carve-up between the MoD aand BAe was the now defunct Astra group. From humble beginnings as a firework manufacturer, in the 1980s Astra became a major player in the munitions industry with operations in the UK, Belgium and the US.

Its prospects already damaged by EPREP, Astra finally came to grief when its Belgian subsidiary was found to have supplied propellant for the Iraqi supergun, which had been illegally trans-shipped from Jordan disguised as a consignment of chocolate. A boardroom coup in 1990, orchestrated by arch-coporate fixer Sir John Cuckney, got rid of the main executive board members, including chairman Gerald James and managing director Christopher Gumbley (later jailed for corruption). By mid-1992, the company had been split up, sold off, and shut down.

The ghost of Astra may yet haunt the government and the arms industry. A DTI-sponsored inquiry into the company's affairs reported in June that information had been submitted to it, "involving senior UK politicians and civil servants, and allegations of illegal arms deals involving foreign governments and government agencies and the security services of the UK and other countries". The inquiry "concluded that it was inappropriate for us to embark on an investigation into these allegations".

The source of the allegations was Gerald James. They concern a group of prominent arms dealers, City figures and Conservative politicians known "The Parlour" or informally "The Savoy Mafia". Membership is said to cover the senior echelons of the main British arms manufacturers and, on the political side, Denis and Mark Thatcher, Alan Clark and Lord Trefgarne. Sir Colin Chandler, Sir John Cuckney and former procurement supremo Peter Levene are among those implicated. James says that several government ministers profited personally from the trade in arms with Iraq. The story has been carried in detail by *Private Eye* in the past 12 months—but James's two attempts to spark an investigation were unsuccessful. The Scott Inquiry is his last hope.

With two City associates, he visited Kenneth de Courcy, the former SIS officer who edits *Intelligence Digest*, at the end of September. De Courcy has sent a file containing their evidence to the inquiry. James can only hope that he receives a more positive response than did Gerald Morse, a stockbroker who approached Scott with information about Alan Clark's dealings in Astra shares: it was dismissed as outside the inquiry's terms of reference. Third time lucky, perhaps.

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For Your Benefit

Benefits staff spent £1.7 million last year on "corporate clothing". Staff can choose from a range of jackets, shirts, blouses, cardigans, trousers, maternity dresses, belts and polo shirts, all paid for out of the social security budget (The Observer)

Good morning! For your benefit,
We're smart and full of zest.
We don't wear two-a-penny kit:
We're corporately dressed.

We're suited up to clear your name
For any welfare due;
In uniform, we'll hear your claim,
Provided that you queue.

From now on, we are bound to laugh
Or give a winning smile,
For we believe that counter staff
Should have a touch of style.

Our men will gaily sport a 'tache,
Our ladies bob their hair,
And any client short of cash
Will have an easy chair.

Our lighting will be quite subdued,
So, if you're in a jam,
Or short of (say) a bite of food,
You'll love our monogram.

Our forms will have a peaceful shade—
Cerise, perhaps, or lime,
So should you ever be delayed,
You'll have a happy time.

If single mothers gaze upon
Our comforting apparel
We're sure they'll heap their praises on
Their scraping from our barrel.

You're sick? You're out of milk? You're broke?
You're long-term unemployed?
Dear madam, give this silk a stroke,
and you'll be overjoyed.

Bill Greenwell

Praful Bidwai says that the Gatt agreement, though held up by the protests of French farmers, caters only to the north, and will impoverish and enslave the third world

Unfree trade

In an eloquent reference to the wholly unequal nature of world trade in the age of colonialism, it used to be said that a critically timed sneeze on the Chicago commodities exchange could instantly ruin thousands of cotton-growing peasants in 19th-century India.

Today, the equations of power in world trade stand perversely altered: the actions of French farmers, a minuscule proportion of the world's agricultural community, could well determine the fate of three billion people elsewhere. And the whims and fancies (or if you like, ideological leanings and cultural biases) of a small, powerful, heavily white-male, yet virtually faceless, bureaucracy based in Geneva, scarcely accountable to any representative, democratic body anywhere, could make or unmake the chances of survival of scores of third-world societies.

The moves of these northern players will shape the outcome of the Uruguay round of negotiations in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Gatt). If the EC's—and in particular, France's—objections to the Gatt draft agreement, especially on agricultural subsidies, prevail, then there is a good chance the Gatt bureaucracy led by the new director-general, Peter Sutherland, will have to open up the agreement for further negotiation.

A virtually faceless bureaucracy could unmake the chances of survival of scores of third-world societies

If, on the other hand, an agreement is reached between the US and the EC, Gatt will have put its seal on what, for the third world, is a horrendously unfair and discriminatory trade regime.

At the moment, it is hard to say what will happen by 15 December, the deadline set by the Gatt bureaucracy to close the Uruguay Round. The *Economic Times* of New Delhi reports that "voices are being raised in Europe to 'cut [Sutherland] down to size'. Senior French sources report that he has been described in the French prime minister's office as 'that irritating little puppy dog let loose by the Americans to snap at France's heels'." The French are likely to drive a hard bargain, but an agreement may yet come through.

Meanwhile, the 15 December deadline hangs like a sword over the heads of the south's peoples. The north and south, with all their internal divisions, have altogether different stakes in the present round.

For the north, what is involved is the pace of reduction of agricultural subsidies (by 21 per cent for cereal exports over a period of six years), conflict over the inclusion of new items, such as audio-visual products (as demanded by the Americans), and a greater access to third-world markets for various northern exports, in particular those of non-essential goods and services.

For the south, the issues go much beyond trade and directly concern long-term policies on investment, agricultural growth, food subsidies for the poor, intellectual property rights and patents, and the potential for development itself. At stake is not just the sovereign rights of governments to make domestic policies, but also the skewed nature of the prevalent foreign trade regime, with its strong, built-in protectionist bias.

The UN Development Programme estimated that in 1991, northern protectionism cost the southern countries $30 billion in lost exports alone. The amount, which has since risen, represents many multiples of the net flow of aid to the south.

Some of these north-south differences were brought out sharply in September in talks on market access in Geneva. While the south focused on barriers against exports of a range of goods, from machinery and textiles to primary commodities and plantation crops, the north argued for freer imports of wines and spirits and lingerie into third-world countries.

For instance, the EC listed Scotch whisky as a "priority" item. And the US reminded Indian negotiators that 40 per cent of Indian women do not use any underwear (which, of course, has nothing to do with poverty) and hence that the American clothing industry should be allowed free access to the market for bras and panties at "economically meaningful" rates of duty.

More importantly, the northern agenda concerns trade-related intellectual property rights(Trips), agricultural policies, and trade in services. Even while imposing northern-biased policies on the world, it seeks to perpetuate the existing inequities in the trade regime, which is anything but free.

On Trips, the north wants Gatt's 115 contracting parties to legislate a regime of intellectual property protection, including patents, that inhibits innovation and invention, but legitimises old, established monopolies. Less than 5 per cent of the world's 30 million or so patents originate in the south. The principal "international" patents agreement, the Paris Convention, has remained unaltered in its basic character since 1883, heavily biased in the north's favour. The Gatt draft (called the Dunkel, after Sutherland's predecessor) strengthens this bias.

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Whether it's rice in Cambodia (top) or beans in Sarawak (bottom), the third world's food supply is under threat from Gatt

This will mean innovators in the south are effectively barred from putting to use novel ideas and processes, however appropriate they might be to their societies and economies, on the ground that they are already patented elsewhere, and that even the importation of patented products from north to south amounts to the "working" of the patent.

Many southern countries do not allow, for sound reasons of social policy, product patents in drugs, food and health-related goods. They will now be forced to permit them, strengthening northern monopolies, and thus raising already high health-care costs. A recent (September) international conference on patents, with representation from the pharmaceuticals industry in Latin America, Asia, Canada and Italy, estimated that, under the Dunkel proposals, the cost of medicines would increase sharply in most third-world countries by up to 500 per cent.

Several southern (and some northern) countries have short-duration (five to seven years) patents for processes, which effectively deter monopolies while ensuring wide availability of products, and make provisions for compulsory licensing (if the patent-holder does not work the patent). They will now be forced to adopt long durations such as 14 or 21 years and abolish compulsory licensing, even when necessary in the public interest.

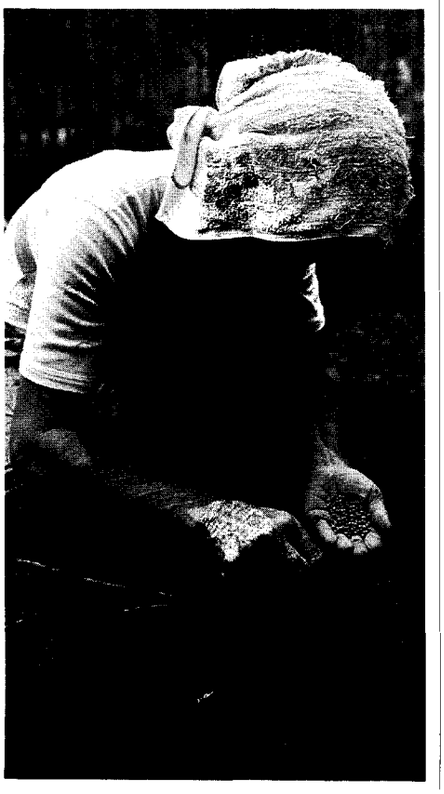
Today, thanks to their intellectual property laws, countries like India or China can produce pharmaceuticals at one-half or less of their cost in the west, because their scientists have mastered chemistry and can develop new, cost-effective, energy-saving processes to make cheaper products. Thus, several Indian firms, make or sell Ranitidine, Glaxo plc's money-spinning anti-ulcer drug, at one-sixteenth of the British cost. Chinese firms can today export many basic drugs at a fifth of their US price. The third world's edge will become sharper as northern patents on drugs and combinations run out in the next decade.

The Gatt draft agreement seeks to undo this advantage. This, as report after report of the UN Conference on Trade and Development has argued, will set the south back by years, making the innovation of appropriate technology difficult, as well as undermining the potential for indigenous, self-reliant, need-based development.

Even competitive third-world exporters, such as South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Indonesia, find that the dice are loaded heavily against them. The Dunkel draft discourages research and development expenditure in the third world by setting low limits on state support. Its proposals are clearly aimed at preventing a replication of the success stories: for example, South Korean steel-making or automobile engineering, Taiwanese electronics, and Indian computer software and pharmaceuticals.

On agriculture too, the story is no different. Most third-world countries that have succeeded in raising foodgrains output substantially and attaining a measure of food security have followed a strategy that emphasises the development of indigenous seeds. Typically, the highest successes have been achieved where public-funded agricultural research made new varieties of seeds freely available to peasant farmers at affordable prices.

Innovators in the south will be barred from putting to use novel ideas and processes, however appropriate



The resilience of third-world agriculture has depended on good natural resource and environmental management and the rejection of the questionable notion of "plant breeders' rights" [read multinational seed companies' privileges]. Most southern countries do not reward companies that manipulate genetic material from southern pools (90 per cent of the world's germplasm) and then sell it back to southern peasants at super profits. The low cost of good seeds is an important factor in maintaining high food output.

However, the Gatt proposals will reverse all this by imposing a tight IPR regime under which seed companies can claim monopolies over genetic material: no one may freely regenerate seeds from harvests based on "their" seeds. The south's plant genetic resources are treated as the "common heritage of humanity" unlike, say, US metallic ores, Swedish forests or German coal, which are "national" resources.

The consequences of such monopolies in the shape of plant breeders' rights under a special convention, or full-fledged patents, can be frightening. Agracetus Inc, a US-based subsidiary of W R Grace & Co, has just been granted a US patent covering all genetically engineered varieties of cotton till 2008. There could be no more efficient way of exploiting captive cotton-growing peasants.

This explains the growing hostility in the third world to northern seed companies. It is no accident that Cargill has become the target of three attacks in India in the past year. Last month, under public protest, it had to wind up a highly controversial project to harvest salt from the sea at Kandla in Gujarat. The project aroused suspicion because the government decided to grant 15,000 acres of land to the company and Cargill made several extravagant and contradictory claims.

No less pernicious is the "framework agreement" in the Gatt draft on services, which would allow multinational firms to invade newly developed service sectors by demanding treatment on a par with fledgling domestic firms. Potentially, this poses a threat to third-world insurance, banking and media, which national governments have no way of meeting once they sign on the dotted line. This is a recipe for unfettered cultural imperialism and finance capital domination.

In return for this charter of humiliation, of "equal" trade among equals, all that the north promises the south is greater access for its textiles and the phasing out of the discriminatory Multi-Fibre Agreement. But even here, the north has not "frontloaded" the measly concessions, most of which will come seven to ten years from now.

The Gatt deal could not have been worse. And yet southern governments, debilitated by the debt crisis, falling prices of exports, low growth rates, many of them still to recover from the "lost decade" of the 1980s, and often alienated from their own peoples, may be in no position to drive a better bargain by 15 December. For the south's peoples, the postponement of the Uruguay Round may be the best hope—even if that comes about through the unintended actions of French farmers or sharpened EC-US rivalry.

The Environmental Picture Library

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Thirty years after the assassination of John F Kennedy, **Alexander Cockburn** argues that Lee Harvey Oswald was motivated to kill by honest left-wing principles

Propaganda of the deed

The entertainment industry has risen to the challenge of the 30th anniversary of John F Kennedy's death with no less than 11 documentaries or semi-fictional films. Aside from one on his childhood, these offerings are divided equally between studies of the assassination and reveries of the glory that was Camelot. Missing in all this is any assessment of JFK's achievements as President.

Time has not burnished his record. Kennedy looks worse as the years roll by. At the end of his recent book, *Rethinking Camelot*, Professor Noam Chomsky of MIT observed that: "In fact, there are striking resemblances between the Kennedy and Reagan administrations."

Both came to office after bogus campaigns about the threatening might of the Evil Empire. Kennedy manufactured the "missile gap" and launched a spiral of rising military spending. Reagan faithfully followed the same strategy. As Chester Bowles remarked of JFK, both were "full of belligerence, sort of looking for a chance to prove their muscle."

Both initiated regressive tax policies for the benefit of investors. Some Reaganites like Jack Kemp always frankly acknowledged Kennedy's pioneering exploits in "supply-side" economics.

At least the CBS film *Jack*, made by Nick and Peter Davis, punctured the myth of JFK as a crusader for civil rights. What aroused him most about the white racist rampages in Birmingham, Alabama, was the fear that the Soviet Union would obtain a propaganda advantage in the cold war.

It was the same cold war fear of the USSR that, two years to the day before his assassination, saw Kennedy decisively commit the United States to a war in Southeast Asia that led, over the next decade and a half, to about two million lives being lost across Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. On 22 November 1961, the President authorised the use of US forces "in a sharply increased effort to avoid a further deterioration of the situation in SVN (South Vietnam)."

The following year, 1962, saw Kennedy prompt a shift in the mission of the Latin American military from "hemispheric defense" to "internal security," providing the infrastructure and training whereby this could be accomplished. As Charles Maechling, who led counter-insurgency and internal defense planning from 1961 to 1966 put it, this shift in mission led to a change from US toleration "of the rapacity and cruelty of the Latin American military" to "direct complicity" in "the methods of Heinrich Himmler's extermination squads."

Simultaneously Kennedy's Alliance for Progress began to force the economic "structural adjustment" programs that in turn prompted greater military oppression across Latin America, even as "economic miracles" prompted soaring unemployment, greater popular discontent, hence greater military oppression.

The Kennedy years saw six military coups overthrow popular regimes. In those Camelot years, the Central American death squads were conjured into being. The road from Kennedy to Reagan is well signposted. Like Reagan, Kennedy was enamoured of covert operations, nowhere more than in the attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro and topple his regime. Kennedy courtiers have been sedulous in trying to claim that the President and his brother, Attorney General RFK, were shielded from the CIA's sponsorship of Mafia hit teams and other assassination bids. Years later, Winn Taplin, a CIA career operations officer, acknowledged that following the Bay of Pigs, covert operation planning and control were taken into the White House and that "there were few in the Agency operational offices in the early 1960s who did not know that Robert Kennedy was the driving force on the special group working to topple Castro." If there was "ever a period in the Agency's existence when a president knew what the agency was doing," Taplin wrote, "it was during the Kennedy years."

Oswald's was one of the few effective assassinations in the history of such enterprises

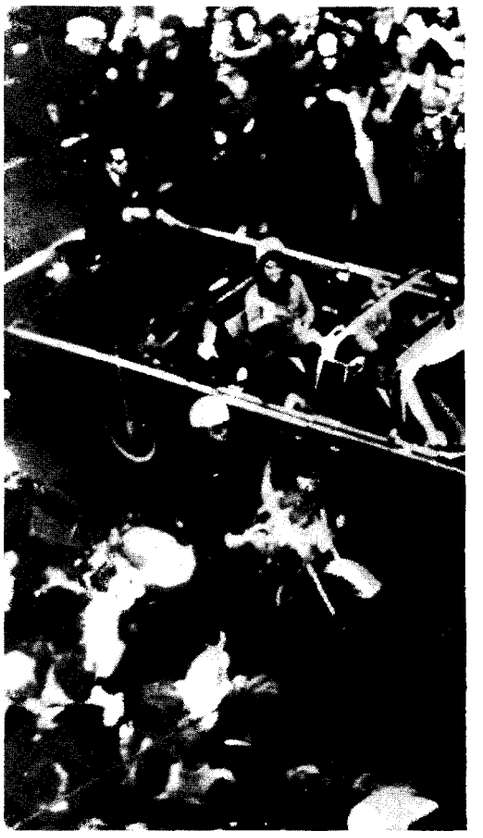
Among the persons who had some inkling of what the President and the CIA were doing against Cuba was Lee Harvey Oswald.

Oswald subscribed to left-wing publications in the United States that discussed the secret war. In a radio debate in New Orleans on 21 August 1963, Oswald declared that "I and the Fair Play for Cuba Committee do think that the United States government, through certain agencies, mainly the State Department and the CIA, has made monumental mistakes in its relations with Cuba."

This was at a time when the CIA was by no means the publicly identified and much-discussed institution it became after the revelations of the mid-1960s. Madame Diem, touring the US after the US-sponsored overthrow and murder, in October 1963, in Saigon, of her husband Ngo Dinh Diem, aroused widespread ridicule and disbelief when she charged the CIA with sponsoring the coup.

Oswald was well-informed and, as his wife Marina later reported, a news junkie. Resident in that city, he surely would have read an AP story in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* for 9 September 1963, quoting Castro as saying, in the story's words, "United States leaders would be in danger if they helped in any attempt to do away with leaders of Cuba." Just two months later in Dallas, Oswald noted the route of Kennedy's impending cavalcade through Dealey Plaza, as published in a local newspaper.

A year after Kennedy's death, Johnson ended the secret war against Cuba, remarking that the CIA had been running "a damned Murder Inc down there." The rationality of Oswald's act was in sync with, in response to, the rationality of the Kennedy brothers' bids against Castro. On the day Oswald fired his Mannlicher-Carcano, a CIA officer in Paris was handing a Cuban agent a pen, filled with poison, with which to assassinate Castro. As Malcolm X famously said at the time of JFK's killing, "The chickens have come home to roost."



The notion of Oswald as a person who acted out of radical political motives runs against the propositions of conspiracy buffs that he was an agent of the right. It also challenges

Hulton

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what Warren commission lawyers used to call the "washing machine" construct of Oswald's personality, meaning that, if only he had been able to afford to buy Marina a washing machine, he would not have felt impelled to kill the President. To ascribe rationality to Oswald is to invest him with a comprehensible mission rather than the homicidal petulance of a psychopath.

The left, in the immediate aftermath of the killing of Kennedy, was terrified it would be scapegoated. Most people initally thought Castro was responsible. In Washington. Johnson and his advisers rushed to cover up what they thought might turn out to be a Russian- or Cuban-inspired assassination, fearing that popular fury might end up with a nuclear stand-off. When the White House discovered that the Dallas district attorney was about to charge Oswald as a communist agent, Washington desperately and successfully quashed the charge.

Intelligence intercepts assured Johnson and his advisers that Castro was stunned by the killing and terrified that he would be held responsible. Fearful of nuclear war, the US elite insisted from the start that there was no international sponsor of the assassination.

Oswald was a subscriber to such periodicals as the *Militant*. He had described himself as a Marxist. In the brief period between his arrest and his murder by Jack Ruby he had given the clenched fist salute. My friend Frank Bardacke vividly remembers the frightened outrage this caused socialists in Berkeley on 23 November, when they saw the Communist salute on television.

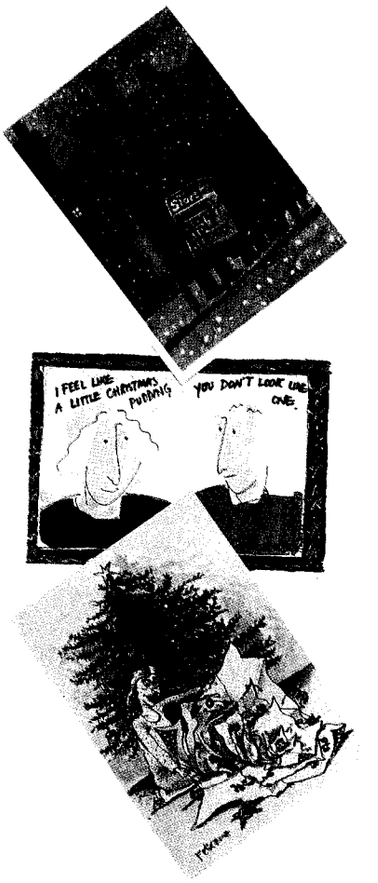
As Leon Day of Oakland recalled to me last year, "The witch-hunt was barely over in 1963, and the Smith Act and McCararn Act were at hand if the government wished to use them. In liberal New York City, the evening of the killing saw city police closing a legal and routine meeting of the Socailist Workers Party. Would the JFK killing provoke the internment of all radicals, as the Wall Street bombing had the Palmer raids of 1919? That night, none of us could be sure.

"For the first year or two after the killing most books and articles postulating a conspiracy came from left-wing publishers. This repaeated almost exactly what the Louisiana Republicans had done in 1935 after one of their followers shot Huey Long. Not wishing to run as the assassination party, they spread the rumor that Long had really been shot by his own guards. Not only did this ploy work, but it's still working on some people to this very day, without a figleaf of fact to cover it."

So it is time, to use the phrase of E P Thompson most beloved by his obituarists, to rescue Oswald from the enormous condescension of posterity. Perhaps one day Oswald will be properly recognised as a leftist who came to the conclusion that the only way to relieve the pressure on Cuba and obstruct the attempts to murder Castro was by killing Kennedy. In this calculation he was correct. A year and a half after the killing in Dallas, Johnson suspended the CIA's assassination and privately denounced the "Murder Inc" that the Kennedys had been running in the Caribbean. Oswald's ambush was one of the few effective assassinations in the history of such enterprises. Too bad that this radical exponent of propaganda of the deed should now be presented by assassination buffs as a pawn of the right.

JFK rides through Dallas minutes before Oswald killed him. Inset: Kennedy became President by cold-war scare-mongering

New Statesman Christmas Postcard offer



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Steve Conlan/Select

Tory politicians claim that children from fatherless families are prone to criminality. But, writes **Angela Phillips**, the evidence is that fathers are often worse than useless

Like father, like son

It was an ordinary chat over a cup of coffee. Two lone mothers talking about their sons. Then she lowered her voice and confided: "The thing that really worries me is his dad. He's in prison and I'm so afraid my son will be like him. He's already started walking with a swagger, and getting into trouble at school. His dad tells him to stand up for himself, to hit back—I am afraid he may be becoming a bit of a bully."

This woman left her husband because he is a thief and because she wants to protect her children from his influence. She may be too late. Her son, who is now 11, dotes on his father. He likes nothing better than to hang around him after school. Twice he's been returned to her by the police—picked up when his father did a runner leaving him behind. Now that his father has been locked up, the boy loses no opportunity to visit him in prison. To his son, this man is a swashbuckling hero. To his ex-wife, he is a source of chaos and unhappiness. She would like to take her children further away, out of his reach, but she can't bring herself to deprive her son of the father he loves. Her dilemma is that she wants him to love his father but not to copy him.

This mother knows all too well the power of paternal influence and it is that power that she wants to escape. Because the fact is that, however much it might satisfy the lynch-mob mentality of the press and politicians to lay blame on a convenient group of female scapegoats, the available evidence suggests that it is not mothers, but fathers, who teach their sons to be bad, and, in the absence of fathers, it is not women, but men, who fill the heads of young lads with stories of the power and glory to be won through fighting, and swaggering and learning to run with the pack.

Paternal influence is potent indeed but, just as any agent powerful enough to have an effect on the human body can have a negative as well as a positive effect, so it is with minds. One of the most important factors in protecting a boy from becoming a criminal is a father who is supportive and intimate. One of the most powerful factors predicting criminality in a child is the presence of a criminal parent (almost always a father). Between these two poles lie a multitude of possibilities, but the idea peddled by such commentators as Norman Dennis and George Erdos (see panel, right), that any man is better than no man in the family, simply doesn't bear close scrutiny.

In their tirade against fatherless families (*Families without Fatherhood*, 1992, Institute of Economic Affairs), Dennis and Erdos make much of the fact that around half of the "super-deprived" delinquent boys in a study in Newcastle had lone mothers. But in their determination to construct a correlation between lone motherhood and delinquency, they almost overlook the fact that the fathers in the other 50 per cent of the super-deprived, delinquent families had made no difference to the boys whatever. Why? Because, according to the research, only 7 per cent of these fathers were "effective, kind and considerate". So simply attaching an inadequate father to a struggling family has no protective effect at all.

Indeed, research based on the 1957 Child Development survey suggests that remarriage, or cohabitation, causes more trouble than lone parenthood *per se*. By age 11, according to a report from the Family Policy Studies Centre (*Crime and the Family*, 1993), boys born illegitimate, whose mothers had not re-coupled, actually had fewer "conduct difficulties" than those who had continued to cohabit, or had remarried.

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For boys who don't conform to their peers' expectations, life can often be an assault course, or worse

One man, now in his forties, talked about the experience of being brought up in a lone-mother household in an era when such arrangements were far less common and when, arguably, the stigma of illegitimacy could have had a far greater effect on his well-being. He says: "I never doubted for a moment that I was wanted. I lived more as a partner than as a child. It was me and her against the world. There was no conflict between us, the conflict was with the rest of the world."

A minority of the sons of lone mothers will experience this unbroken solidarity. Most mothers try to re-couple. Early marriage, when the man takes on the role of father to the young boy, often works. The trouble starts when the new man in the mother's life becomes a source of conflict rather than support. All studies show it is family conflict that is most unsettling for children, though few of them attempt to explain why it is that boys are so much more likely to display their distress by behaving badly. Though they are no more likely than other boys to be violent, or to be involved in serious crime, boys from broken homes are over-represented among those picked up for the kind of attention-seeking behaviour that screams out: "I am a boy! Notice me!"

American psychologist Professor Mavis Heatherington heads a team that researches the effect of divorce. Her studies fill in some of the details of exactly what happens to children when they go through the shock of losing an important figure in their lives. One study focuses on children whose parents separated when they were four years old and she traces the effect on their social relationships in devastating detail.

Initially, both boys and girls reacted to the disruption by behaving badly. This in turn affected their ability to make friends at school. However, within a year, the girls had adjusted. By the end of two years, their behaviour and social integration did not differ from their two-parented peers. The boys' behaviour had also adjusted by the second year (according to their teachers and parents), but they continued to be ostracised by their peers. Boys, it would seem, are remarkably unforgiving when a child's behaviour does not conform.

Heatherington describes how these boys, rocked by the loss of their fathers, were then pushed to the margins of their peer group, forced to resort to playing with younger children or (when they were allowed to) with girls. Other research shows also that they tend to be less likely to play "contact sports". Most commentators "blame" this failure to conform to the expected patterns of masculine behaviour on the absence of fathers in their lives, but Heatherington's research seems to suggest that the problem lies in the attitude of their peers. It is no wonder, then, that by the time they were ready for secondary school, many of them would be prepared to do just about anything to be accepted as "one of the lads".

Heatherington does not attempt to explain the gender difference, she merely describes it, but it may well be rooted in the very different ways in which boys and girls learn about their gender identity. A sense of what it means to be a boy, or a girl, is important to a child's sense of security. Girls absorb complex details about what it means to be female from female carers by the time they start nursery school.

Boys spend little time around men, either at work or at leisure, so they have little direct information with which to colour in their image of adult men. They learn what it is to be a "real boy" largely from their peers and, by the time they are seven, the coercive process of masculinisation is well under way. Boys mercilessly tease those who do not conform to the group idea of masculinity. Those who feel confident and secure about being "different" will find a way through. Less confident children will be vulnerable. It is almost inevitable that those who have been through the unsettling experience of divorce will be among the vulnerable ones.

Several young men have talked to me about the difficulties they faced learning to conform at school. One said: "I had to deal with kids who were used to being rougher than I was. I got teased because I didn't fight and if someone teased me I would just cry. I never did fight so people took the piss. Now, looking back, I think it would have been different if I had done it. I mean, there were some kids who everyone thought were puny, but if they fought back once it was OK. No one would mess with them again." This young man had two parents, and two older brothers, to provide an alternative view of what it can mean to be male. He didn't become a fighter, in spite of his tough talking, and has a college career ahead of him.

Another, whose parents separated when he was eight, told me: "I couldn't stand primary school, I hated it. When I went to secondary school, I thought it would help if I toughened up a bit so I decided to join the cadets. But some of the kids were really violent. I've always been pretty timid and it began to get to me." This boy, deeply upset by his parents' separation, victimised by other children, was unable to reconcile the image of masculinity presented by his parents with the world outside. In the end, he dropped out of school and just stayed home in bed.

A third young man had a similar experience, but his attempt to conform, at least in his own terms, was successful. He joined a skinhead gang and learned to fight. He is now a member of an extreme right-wing organisation. His mother told me: "I was desparate and crying out for advice from anyone: doctors, teachers, psychiatrists, therapists, friends or family. I went everywhere, obsessively asking for help to stop the nightmare getting worse."

It wasn't his mother who made him bad. It was the men in his life. Those who failed to provide him with an image of what a good man could be are just as much to blame as those who waded in to take advantage of his weakness. Perhaps it is here, in male culture, not in mothering, that we should look for the seeds of violence and crime.

Angela Phillips is the author of "The Trouble with Boys", Pandora Press, £7

Sarah Baxter takes a dim view of *Families Without Fatherhood*

"Families without Fatherhood", by Norman Dennis and George Erdos, has become one of the most talked about books of the year. Published last year by the right-wing think-tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs (and now available in a new edition), it has defined the terms of debate about lone parenthood, informed politicians, and won flattering notices in leader columns.

The authors, however, describe themselves as "ethical socialists". Norman Dennis, a child of the depression, grew up in Sunderland; George Erdos was born in Hungary just after the war, and came to England in the 1960s. The book's introduction is by the distinguished sociologist, A H Halsey, now 70, whom the IEA depicts in Brezhnevite fashion as "a lifelong leader of socialist thought".

Every argument used by Peter Lilley and Michael Howard to attack single mothers can be found in this book. The authors blame the trahison des clercs—the betrayal of the family by liberal intellectuals and the 1960s generation—for the rise in delinquency. They insist that crime cannot be blamed on unemployment; nor rioting on social conditions.

For Dennis and Erdos, it is the task of socialists to uphold family and community ties. There has been a "strange reversal of roles", they write. "The 'right' has taken a collectivist stand and the 'left' has taken what is in substance a 'free market' stand."

It would be more accurate to say that both the left and the right came to take a 'free market', or libertarian, stand. The individual freedoms gained in the 1960s and 1970s helped Thatcher to win consent for her economic liberalism. But just as John Major has been calling for a return to "basics", so Labour politicians have been reassessing their attitudes towards crime and the family.

Labour should beware. The authors of "Families without Fatherhood" are out to restore the distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. The respectability they admire was policed and maintained by stigma, by fear of the workhouse and the threat of becoming an outcast.

Dennis and Edros agree that absent fathers rather than single mothers are the problem. But they believe that only women can control men's sexual impulses. It is up to women to refuse to become lone parents; and that means disinterring the old "moral judgmentalism" and financial sanctions.

This is the secret of their success with the right. Women would be the losers, but, for the sake of the children, we would just have to put up with it.

No thanks.

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We are an incestuous lot, journalists. Give us a good story about our own profession and we'll squeeze it for every pinch of column-inchage we can get. Sunday Times editor Andrew Neil, clearly not content with a two-page "Insight" special on the subject in his paper last weekend, is not alone among journalist readers of NSS this week in passing further comment (see letter opposite) on the sneaked gym photos of She-Who-Doesn't-Sweat.

A senior Mirror journalist asks not be to be named because, "Although I signed the loyalty pledge demanded by [Mirror editor] David Banks after the journalists' no-confidence vote when he took over, I don't think it would be enough to save me if he knew I was writing this." S/he says there was "enormous unease" about the Diana photos at the Mirror, "not because anyone had any great objections about publishing them, but because the result of doing so was absolutely predictable . . .

By breaking the voluntary code of practice at this time, it gave politicians the excuse they were looking for to introduce statutory controls. It doesn't matter tuppence whether or not papers are allowed to 'intrude on privacy' to print pictures of royalty. It matters enormously, though, that we should be able to intrude on privacy to get stories that are of real public interest and importance."

I felt much the same last week when our printers refused to handle NSS if it contained the intended two-inch high facsimiles of the Mirror front pages featuring Princess Di. These were to have illustrated our article on the gym photos farrago ("A zoom with a view"), but the printers declined to print them—despite the fact that various television news programmes, the Express, Sun and even the Financial Times all used similar pictures to illustrate stories on the subject after Diana obtained an injunction restraining the Mirror from publishing further photos.

It didn't matter overmuch in this instance. But the refusal to print comes dangerously close to censorship, and there are many circumstances in which such restraints on publication—whether by printers acting on their own initiative or by government acting through legislation—would be a much more serious matter.

Former NS editor Bruce Page said this week that a number of investigative stories he was involved with, including the Sunday Times inquiry into Thalidomide, the drug that caused thousands of deformities among babies as a result of being prescribed to pregnant women, would have been seriously impeded if privacy laws had been in place. Of a scientist whom Page pressured into playing a key part in his inquiries, he said: "I was certainly violating his privacy at the time, and I'm sure the drugs company would have stopped me if they had had a law to help them." How many other important stories will remain unrevealed if proposals to prohibit bugging, taking photographs on private property without consent, or entering or remaining on private property without consent are put into effect?

"Intrusive" journalism of the Diana gym photos variety induces a kind of mass schizophrenia. The public condemns the journalism, but buys the papers. It pays for that which it purports to loathe.

The condition is a familiar one: "The fact is that the public have an insatiable curiosity to know everything, except what is worth knowing. Journalism, conscious of this, and having tradesmanlike habits, supplies their demands. In centuries before ours the public nailed the ears of journalists to the pump. That was quite hideous. In this century journalists have nailed their own ears to the keyhole. That is much worse."

This was Oscar Wilde, in "The soul of man under socialism", written in 1891. Wilde had his own reasons for concluding that, "The tyranny [the press] exercises over people's private lives seems to me to be quite extraordinary . . . The private lives of men and women should not be told to the public. The public have nothing to do with them at all." But Wilde's were not reasons enough for restraints upon the press then, any more than they are today.

Steve Platt

Against disablism

There are intellectual, as well as physical, laws of motion. The political equivalent of Newton's third law is that every ideology provokes an ideology which begins as its opposite and tends to become its equal. Right is reflected by left, anti-semitism by Zionism, sexism by anti-sexism, and so on. In the same way, "ablism", the attitude that disabled people are inferior to others, is reflected by "disablism", the attitude that disabled people are equal to, or even superior to, others.

Agnes Fletcher's able exposition of disablism ("Fighting for the right to be different", 29 October) must be answered not by a reversion to ablisms but by a repetition of reason and common sense. Disabled people are right to fight against irrational prejudice or unnecessary discrimination and for reasonable benefits and necessary facilities, to build up individual confidence and collective solidarity, and also to resort to direct action and civil disobedience when appropriate; but they are wrong to say things which are untrue and to do things which are unintelligent.

The disability movement, and especially the so-called "radical" disability movement, is in danger of becoming one of the main enemies of disabled people—just as similar extremists in the women's, gay and anti-racist movements—because it encourages false consciousness among both disabled and non-disabled people. Its leaders may well "acknowledge that the disability movement in no way reaches the full constituency of disabled people", but they may well be wrong about the reason. It is not only because many disabled people are institutionalised, but also because many disabled people feel alienated by the activists themselves.

The first duty of any movement or ideology is not to be politically correct, but to be factually and logically correct. Agnes Fletcher makes or quotes several statements which illustrate the mess we are getting into. It is nonsense to claim that disability is "a concept in which we can have pride", or to pretend that the disabled are "a group of people who have been disabled by society", or to allege that "disability is a matter of social relations, not medical conditions", or to imagine that the genuine needs of disabled people are "civil rights", let alone "human rights". And to "identify oneself as a disabled person" as "a political statement of allegiance", or to identify the indifference or hostility of ordinary people with overt persecution or a final solution, is to take political correctness to a paranoid conclusion.

The first problem for a disabled person is the disability itself—the lack of an ability—not other people's attitude towards it. The blind can't see, the deaf can't hear, the lame can't walk, the dumb can't talk; the varying difficulties caused by Aids, arthritis, paralysis, epilepsy, diabetes, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, or just old age, are essential, not incidental, to the fact of disability. As a result, the first duty of a disabled persons is not to "come out" or be accepted as disabled, but to understand one's disability and one's ability to deal with it. This means not the "internalisation of our oppression", but the recognition of our situation.

It is a mark of the mess that we have already got into that at this point I must defend myself against personal attack by making the personal defence that I am myself disabled—a cripple, or whatever euphemism is currently in fashion. I am disabled not by society, which sometimes disables me, but by my medical condition, the fact that I can't walk. No one can alter that, and this is where I must start from. Of course, it is society that sometimes disables me, in the sense that other people hinder me passively by not helping or by actively obstructing me—as when *NSS* holds a function in an inaccessible building or makes it difficult for a disabled person to call!—but it is also society that enables me, in the sense that other people help me by walking on my behalf or by providing the physical aids and financial benefits that restore some measure of mobility. Like all disabled people, I sometimes get cross with society for not doing enough, but when this happens I remind myself of Tolstoy, who said that everyone wants to change society, but no one wants to change themselves.

People on the left, who have become indoctrinated to have

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faith in universal welfare, tend to believe that disability can be relieved by society, but there are two objections here. One is that even the best physical aids and financial assistance can't relieve disability completely, and the other is that such aids and assistance are very expensive. For one thing, society isn't able to do everything, and for another, it may not be willing to try. Disabled people have no "rights" to such things, any more than anyone else does, any more than they have rights to anything else.

It is a matter of personal choice and political policy. If other people prefer not to help, or prefer to help through individual care or through charity, it is up to them, and it is up to us to make the best of it. Of course we need some basic things—reasonable access to places and activities, reasonable assistance in our various difficulties—but beyond this it is up to us and our fellows and our loved ones to handle our situations. The activists may get our support, but they can't count on it, and they certainly don't get mine for legislative campaigns.

Socialism doesn't mean demanding help from the state, whether central government or local authorities; it means developing a society in which people learn to help one another. Rather than state aid, I prefer mutual aid. Instead of feeling sorry for ourselves or angry with other people, we should put our disability into perspective and concentrate on our abilities.

Nicolas Walter
London N1

Savage Bromley

As a contemporary of Hanif Kureishi and Chris Savage King, also growing up in Bromley in the 1970s, I enjoyed Savage King's lively review of *The Buddha of Suburbia* (Television, 5 November). But let's not get too nostalgic for the purple haze of Bromley High Street; this suburb was also the home of John Tyndall, founder of the National Front, whose expression of horror that his old school, Beckenham Boys' Grammar, had begun to have a black presence, found some support behind the net curtains.

At my school you were either a hippy or a "skin"; while I floated on oceans of bliss and longed for Tibetan boots, our skinhead

schoolmates were out "Paki-bashing". We imagined one kind of subcontinental stereotype, gentle and esoteric; they imagined another. The difference was that while our *saddhus* remained 7,000 miles away, their "Pakis" were the enemy within to be spat at for daring to peep over the privet.

Sure, Kureishi was informed by a libertarian politics which grew out of the sixties, but all of us adolescents growing up in the Bromley were, whether we liked it or not, also shaped by another revolutionary politics in England at the time: Powellism.

Ruth Borthwick
London SW2

Cultural differences

Exactly why Helen Brinton (Letters, 12 November) sees fit to castigate the Liberal Democrats for "not sighting a starting block" in the attempt to break the male stranglehold on Westminster is beyond me.

The Lib Dems fielded more woman candidates at the last general election than any other party; in by-elections during this parliament, the only woman candidate from a major party was a Lib Dem (Diana Maddock —now MP); and in the latest internal Lib Dem elections, 42 per cent of those elected to major committees were women.

There is some way to go, particularly when considering the numbers of women fighting the most winnable seats, but the examples above reflect the differences in culture between the two parties. While Labour has to impose woman-only shortlists on recalcitrant constituency parties, Lib Dems can trust their members not to behave in the appallingly chauvinistic way exemplified by the Parliamentary Labour Party in the recent shadow cabinet elections.

Jon Whitehouse
Holgate Hall
York

Lost in the myths of time

Ian Aitken at times sounds more like a 78-speed record stuck in its groove than a respected political commentator, as he repeatedly uses his column to peddle the stupid myth that it was the existence of a third political force that guaranteed Tory victories in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992.

For a start, Aitken has conveniently forgotten that an upsurge in the Liberal vote in 1974, and to a lesser extent in 1964, actually accompanied Labour Party victories. Second, Tory victories since 1979 have been based on the support of only 42-44 per cent of the electorate. This has, of course, been translated into Tory majority governments merely due to our current electoral system, which, despite disproportionately benefiting the Tories, is still firmly defended—with a few notable exceptions—by the mainstream of the Labour Party.

But in last week's *NSS*, regurgitating just one myth proved to be insufficient for Ian Aitken, and it now looks as if he has taken upon himself the task of rewriting the history of the Liberal Party ("Marching to the sound of Tory gunfire", 12 November). He made the incredible claim that Jo Grimond was in a position to become prime minister ". . . since the voters were given at least three unqualified opportunities to make him prime minister—and refused to do so in their tens of millions".

This statement is inaccurate, as general elections are not exclusively about selecting prime ministers, but most importantly because it was only as recently as the 1970s that the Liberal Party started to put up a full slate of parliamentary candidates. Indeed, Jo Grimond became party leader after the 1955 general election, when only 110 Liberal candidates had been fielded, and even at the last election for which he led the party, that of 1966, the number of candidates, while having trebled, still meant that only every other constituency had a Liberal candidate.

The simple fact—which Aitken has such difficulty grasping—is that Jo Grimond was given such a kind and respected send-off because he held out an exciting vision of a radical non-socialist party effectively challenging the Tories. This vision not only inspired thousands of men and women, but as events on 6 May this year demonstrated, the vision has now become a reality.

The wit, charm and intelligence of Jo Grimond merely added to the greatness of the man.

Mark C Morris
Aylesford
Kent

Weak argument

In his idiosyncratic defence of the *Mirror*'s publishing of the Princess Diana pictures, Steve Platt ("A zoom with a view", 12 November) takes a sideswipe at the *Sunday Times*, claiming that we have provided "a platform for Nazi apologists". I guess if you have a weak argument you have to lash out at any target, however irrelevant, and I assume he's referring to our use of David Irving to translate the Goebbels diaries.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of using Irving to translate the diaries—we could find nobody else to translate them, though several accomplished academics tried—I would like to point out that at no stage was Irving given a platform for any of his views, including his fascist fantasies about the Holocaust. Not a word from him appeared in the *Sunday Times*, though his views were

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splashed across most other broadsheets, and nothing we published from the diaries gave comfort to his Nazi apologist theories. Indeed, several excerpts specifically refuted his previous positions on Hitler's supposed ignorance about what was happening to the Jews. And, as part of our serialisation, we sent our most distinguished feature writer to Auschwitz to remind everybody in a 5,000-word essay about the horrors that happened there. Mr Platt should be more careful with the facts.

Andrew Neil
Editor, Sunday Times
London E1

Compromising challenge

John Cole's intemperate response to his critics (12 November) serves only to reinforce the points we made. I suppose we should be grateful for the small mercy that we were not dubbed IRA stooges for daring to question his passive unionism. It is he, not his critics, who chose to define the situation crudely in terms of "good guys" and "bad guys".

Many loyalists are critical of the intransigence of unionist politicians. The politicians themselves are haunted by the ghosts of O'Neill and Faulkner—unionists who were destroyed for daring to compromise in the search for peace. Already the Democratic Unionist Party is making dispositions for a similar fate for James Molyneux. Loyalists who yearn for peace and know that compromise is the only way to create it are reluctant to speak out. This is where influential loyalists who are outside or above the political battle can play a vital role, and none more than John Cole. By declining this role and refusing rational debate, he is missing an opportunity. By lending his authority to unionist shibboleths, he is making settlement less likely.

With no justification, John Cole dismissed me as a "green". Nevertheless, I offer him a challenge. I will write a criticism of the nationalists and an advocacy of the compromises that could be made by them if he will do the same for the unionists.

Eric E Robinson
Chorley
Lancashire

THIS ENGLAND

£5 for all entries printed below. Entries on a POSTCARD please

•None of us can sleep easily in our beds when 10 per cent of 17 year olds cannot find Britain on a map of the world.—Letter in the *Daily Telegraph* (Brenda Rowe)

• Before the Children Act, we had more authority. Now we're supposed to lead by example and look after people. We used to set essays: "Write 2,000 words about the inside of a ping-pong ball"—that sort of thing. Now we get them to copy out *Times* leaders.—Head boy of Tonbridge school in the *Daily Telegraph* (Tim Hopkins)

Green and blue

The combination of articles in last week's *NSS* on nuclear power ("Thorp in our side" and Green Gauge) were depressing reading for those of us who seek a green Labour Party. Crispin Aubrey demonstrated the extent of Labour's impact on the Thorp debate: "sceptical neutrality", abstention, and "leaving the main criticism to come from the Liberal Democrats". These are hardly the actions of an effective opposition party, especially at a time when the whole future of nuclear power is in the balance.

If Labour abdicates its role of opposition to government policy to environmental pressure groups and academics, as it has over Thorp, then the powerful nuclear lobby could well win the day, with disastrous consequences both for the party's electoral credibility and the future of renewable energy.

Labour argued during the coal debate for a coherent national energy policy. Ducking the nuclear question would make a mockery of that position. To have any environmental credibility, Labour must be more forthright in its opposition to nuclear power, and the arguments for a sustainable energy policy need to be articulated by more of the front bench than just Chris Smith.

Chris Hewett
Coordinator, Labour
Environment Campaign
London N4

Minimum defence

Last week *NSS* gave sympathetic coverage to CND ("What have we done?", 12 November) and published an interview with shadow defence minister David Clark ("Realms of defence", 12 November). The first was a matter of record where, sadly, media reticence in recent years has been most marked. After all, how many current political campaigns with more than 50,000 members have been written off by the major papers?

Activists may have been disappointed by the tone of the interview with David Clark—although he has shown, unlike his predecessor, that he is willing to listen, and likely to adopt good ideas. It is a sign of growing self-confidence and a more open attitude that John Smith and David Clark met Labour Action for Peace, which their predecessors declined to do.

Benn Webb referred to members of the Campaign group and other Labour members who support nuclear disarmament as "this raucous constituency". Forthright, perhaps; disappointed with the party for running away from nuclear disarmament at a time when it might have made it stick, certainly. Their fault in the eyes of the politically correct members is that they still believe that nuclear disarmament by Britain is an achievable prospect.

Webb tells us that Mr Clark "believes what the experts tell him". In the case of the European Fighter Project, he was persuaded by British Aerospace. The experts on Trident have no doubt persuaded him that it is too late to save any money by cancelling it. We are told that he would keep it but probably not use it, and that after Trident there would probably be no case for British nuclear weapons.

It is clear that he has not listened to *all* the experts, of which there is no shortage in the peace movement. A proper dialogue is needed if sensible defence policies are to be achieved. Clark showed that he has an open mind when he spoke at a CND lobby in the House of Commons earlier this year. Will the Labour Party become the first to develop a proper, non-imperial minimum defence?

Jim Addington
Surbiton
Surrey

Gripping judgement

Thank you, Bill Greenwell (Poem, 5 November), for highlighting the absurd ruling on repetitive strain injury by Judge Prosser in the case brought by National Union of Journalists member Rafiq Mughal against the Reuters news agency.

As someone who has experienced for almost two years the pain, sleepless nights, practical and financial difficulties arising from this industrial injury, I was interested to learn that the condition is "meaningless" and that I must have an "eggshell personality".

I would like to spend 10 minutes in a locked room with Judge Prosser and we'd see, at the end, which of us needed to "get a grip on themselves" (his words).

Helen "Humpty" Dady
London N16

Illiterate clot

Who is this illiterate clot Sean French, who thinks that the underground dwellers who share H G Wells' world of the future are called "Warlocks" (Diary, 12 November)? Warlocks, in folklore, are male witches. The contemporaries of the decadent Eloi were the Morlocks. Read the book, see the film.

The Time Machine, published in 1894, is now coming up to its centenary. It was Wells' first book, seminal for most later science fiction, and superior—because it's less fantastic and more "scientific"—to Jules Verne's nightmare journeyings. In *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, for example, Verne describes the temperature at the heart of a volcano as fairly mild.

Gavin Ewart
London SW15

Lost authority

Sean French (Diary, 22 October) comments on the doctor as a "reassuring authority figure" in children's play and quotes in evidence the rhyme: "Five little monkeys dancing on the bed/One fell down and bumped his head/Mummy called the doctor, the doctor said/'No more monkeys jumping on the bed'."

This is only part of the song. My seven and six-year-old

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granddaughters tell me that it begins with 12 little monkeys jumping on the bed, and continues down, repeating the same words, to one little monkey. It is clear that, far from being an authority figure, little monkeys and their mothers take no notice of them.

Dr Ann Dally
Petworth
West Sussex

Khuynyaizatsia

Whatever some western observers ("Why the west must support Yeltsin", 1 October) and correspondents (BBC Moscow correspondent Angus Roxburgh, Letters, 22 October) may think, the view from here is better summed up in your editorial ("Bonaparte Boris", 24 September) and in Mat Coward's marvellous piece (Backchat, 15 October)—"Bollockisation" would appear to be a worldwide phenomenon, by the way. Here one would call it *khuynyaizatsia* or, more politely, *chepukhizatsia*.

"Say what you like about Soviet authority and the Communist Party, at least when they were in power ordinary working people could feed themselves and their families, have some kind of housing, get to work on time on public transport which was at least functioning, walk safely on the streets at night, and once in a while be able to buy something decent to wear . . ."

One hears many comments of this kind in offices, factories and hospitals throughout the Community of Indigent Souls. That the supposed reforms have led to what is referred to here as "massive plundering", and a severe maldistribution of wealth and income, is for all to see and for most to bemoan.

Yes, shops in Moscow may be full, but mainly because pockets are empty. Even on television they show pictures of a pensioner crying in front of a full shop counter: "How can I continue to live with these prices? There is nothing here that I can afford to buy." In the meantime, it is said that about half of Daimler Benz's output of model 600 Mercedes cars goes to Moscow. Is it any wonder that donors of aid of any kind—humanitarian, economic, and technical—are sceptical? There have been enough reports of aid being diverted form its intended recipients only to line the pockets of the already over-privileged.

A writer on the *Moscow News* some years ago described the television tower at Ostankino in northern Moscow as "a giant syringe for injecting ideology into the country". The serum may have changed, but the high-pressure injection of a steady stream of lies and half-truths continues. Similarities are drawn here between the actions of the Yeltsin group and the *Machetrgreifung* by the National Socialists in Germany.

Few here are in a position to have the necessary global perspective fully to appreciate John Pilger's analysis ("The War Against Democracy", 8 October), but none of it comes as a surprise. The west's continued and vocal support for "their" man elicits only resigned shrugs and comments like "Well they would, wouldn't they?" Here, there are few illusions about who is responsible for what Zhores Medvedev called the "bizarre shock therapy" ("A capital coup", 8 October).

Maybe for the west, Gaidar is a "symbol"of reform, but his face is more like that of a well-fed pig. At that, he is a very convincing symbol of the directions the "reforms" have thus far taken, where a few are allowed to overfeed and leave nothing for the rest.

George W Mills
Kiev
Ukraine

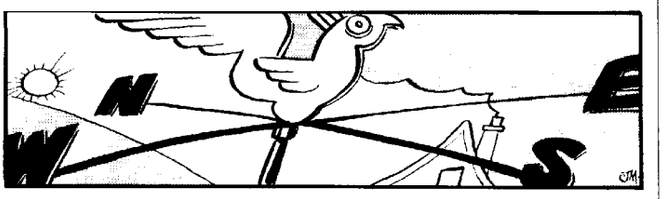
A classy victory

Communique No. 3:
1) The Save Steve Platt for Socialism Campaign welcomes the news that *NSS* has been saved for posterity ("The future of *NSS*", 12 November).
2) The Campaign wishes to announce that following a meeting of the central committee, "Big Ron" Beard has been expelled for claiming that "victory" is a bourgeois concept and arguing that the left must unequivocally support the principle of "glorious defeat".

The Save Steve Platt for Socialism Campaign
London SE1

The editor writes: These communiques are now closed

FRINGE BENEFITS



Colin Ward can't wait for the Sproat memoirs to reach the public library

The day I contributed my mite to National Library Week by talking at our local library about what libraries had meant in my life, a chilling note appeared in the paper. It explained that everybody connected with libraries is nervous about their future, since Iain Sproat, described as a junior minister at the Department of National Heritage, had asked: "Is there still something sufficiently distinctive about reading as recreation to justify its being made publicly available without charge?"

So I inquired from our county librarian about this story. "Yes," she said, "I was there. It was at the public librarians' conference. He came and told us that the government was initiating a library review, made a few remarks like that, and then rushed off without answering any questions."

This Sproat (Winchester, Magdalen College, Cricket Writer of the Year for 1983, whose recreation is book collecting) sounds to me like those opponents of the Libraries Act of 1850 who feared that the habit of reading romantic novels would give idle servant girls aspirations above their station.

To this extent he is an accurate reflection of our National Heritage, but his ridiculously named department was reported in June to have welcomed an existing survey from Comedia called "Borrowed Time? The future of public libraries", which stressed the future importance of this network of 19,000 outlets in giving access to new technologies and multi-media dissemination of information and ideas.

Book-collecting Sproat has the usual non-library user's emphasis on the library as a lending agency, rather than as everyone's resource centre. But it is far more than that. The Comedia team had some vital findings about libraries, familiar to librarians but not to many opinion-formers and decision-makers. I'll quote at length, as their work costs £20, and, while Sproat has a free copy, you'll have to seek it through your own public library, which "was used by a wider cross-section of the local population than almost any other public, commercial or retail institution in the town centre; it was an important resource for the elderly, both for book-borrowing and newspaper-reading; it was an entry point for many members of ethnic minority groups (often as students or language-learners) into the wider civic society; it was a focal point for children and parents, and for school use; it was regarded as a key information point and archive of local identity; it was felt to be a 'safe' environment in which to meet people, sit and browse, or use without payment or pressure (an increasingly rare use of space in the modern town centre); it was perceived as being 'neutral' or democratic territory, open to all, where people could experience their identity as citizens rather than consumers, though there remained for some people a 'fear of the threshold' common to many cultural institutions; but its ambience often successfully crossed the boundaries between learning and leisure, enlightenment and entertainment, casual use and dedicated study, which many other arts and cultural facilities failed to do."

I can't improve on the Comedia working paper, *The Place of the Library*, in explaining why libraries are priceless. Unlike Sproat, with every resource available, also without charge, I have a huge vested interest in the public library. When I talked there the other week, Geoff Ross, our ever-helpful local librarian, combed the county for copies of my books. I was flattered by the display, but reflected that the book trade being what it is, most are out of print. How else can I communicate my folly or wisdom to fellow citizens but through the library shelves?

One day Sproat, the temporary trustee of our National Heritage, will write his memoirs, and his publisher will remainder them. Then he, too, will be gratified that his profundity will still be on the shelves, free of charge but at the cost of us all. It's a vital aspect of the freedom of information.

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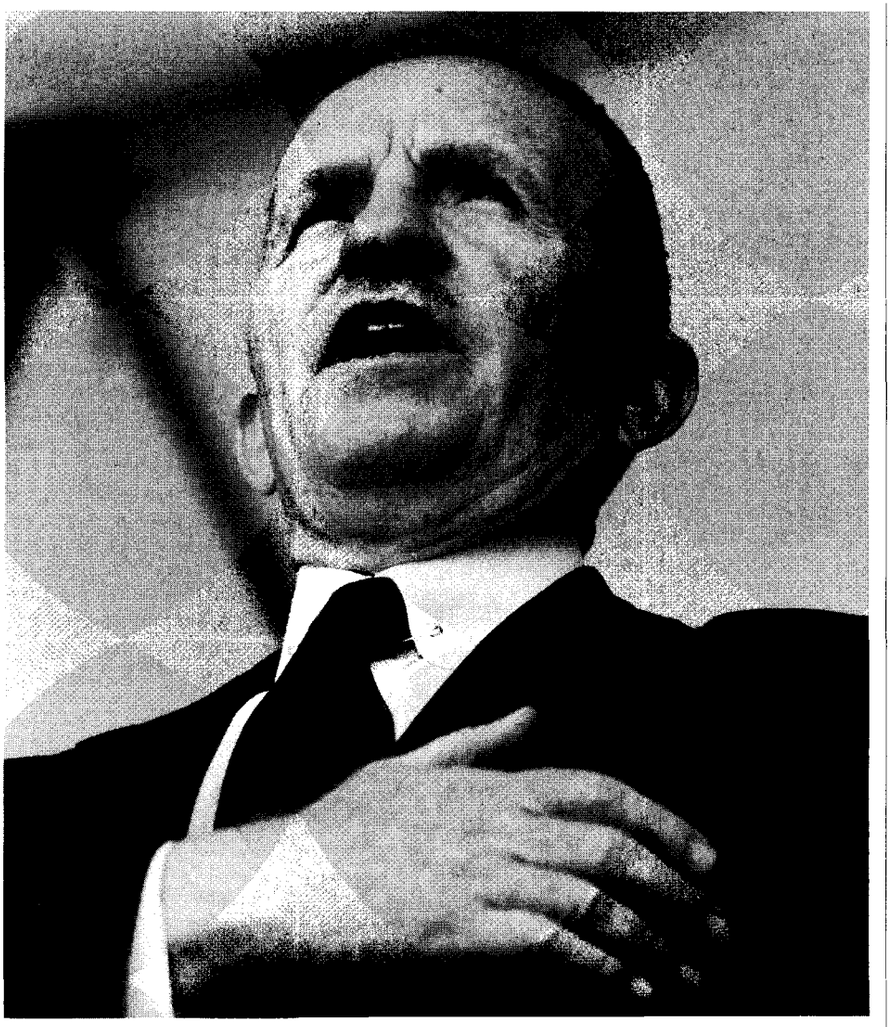

Select Photos

On the side of the angels: Ross Perot lends his ears to the environmental cause

Alexander Cockburn says that, however the vote for the proposed North American Free Trade Association goes, there will be a lot of losers, including the environment

Land of the free-for-all

The political battle over the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) that reached its climax this week (It was being voted on by Congress as this magazine went to press) saw a particularly furious commotion within the environmental movement in the United States.

Most footsoldiers in the various environmental organisations saw the proposed trade agreement as a means whereby US and Canadian corporations could shift ever more rapidly south of the border, thereby avoiding US state and federal regulations, and happily externalising their costs by spewing poisons and wastes into Mexico's air and water.

It took Ross Perot's Texan billions to get on national TV and link Nafta to Mexican shanty-towns, anti-union goon squads, corporate murder via industrial toxins, the one-party state, and super-exploitation of low-cost labour by US multinationals—because leftists don't get the opportunity. Practically everything Perot said about Nafta in his debate with Al Gore last week on *Larry King Live* could have been plucked from Ralph Nader's *Multinational Monitor*, and probably was. Perot and Nader are allies in this battle. Perot may be a son of a bitch, but last week he was the left's son of a bitch, and we should salute him for it.

There's plenty of documentation of the filth associated with production in the *maquiladoras*—assembly plants—strung out along the south side of the US-Mexican border. The Rio Grande is a sewer for similar reasons. With Nafta, this environmental degradation would be more widely disseminated across Mexico.

In the days of the Bush presidency, a number of mainline environmental groups headed by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)—after assiduous wooing by both the Bush White House and by the Fortune 500 firms backing Nafta—announced their guarded support for the prospective agreement, on the ground that it would permit greater invigilation than in the present anarchic circumstances.

This trend continued under Clinton. Officials from the mainstream groups continued to vault into government. The president of the Wilderness Society joined Bruce Babbitt's Department of the Interior. Most of the big groups, at least those sustained by corporate handouts, continued to be vociferous in support of the agreement. The main opponent was the Sierra Club, along with Friends of the Earth, some chapters of the Audubon Society and Greenpeace, though the latter was not much of a player.

The WWF and its accomplices claimed that they had exacted from the administration a splendid "side agreement"—something promised by Clinton during his presidential campaign—ensuring that Nafta would not lead to a ratcheting down of standards in all three countries—US, Canada and Mexico—in the name of free trade and competition. But the agreement recently reached with Mexico is essentially toothless when it comes to enforcement.

The saga points to a looming crisis in the US environmental movement, namely the rapidly widening rift between the national officials and lobbyists, based in Washington, and the grassroots members scattered across the rest of the country. The former see the grassroots types as naive about the realities of the power game inside the Beltway. The grassroots legions see the Washington crowd as hopelessly compromised and let their memberships lapse. All of the environmental groups are presently experiencing declining membership and budgetary crisis.

The Clinton administration threw everything into the fight to get the agreement through Congress. The pro-Nafta campaign spent around $30 million. Almost uniformly the corporate press was for it, and under the torrent of propaganda, the 70 per cent of all Americans who thought Nafta would lead to job flight a couple of months ago had been reduced to 49 per cent.

As with so many momentous economic debates, the fight has been about something that, largely, has already happened. Jobs have been heading south for decades. Ask any older worker from the shoe or garment industry in New Hampshire and Massachussetts. Cheap assembly with low-cost labour has been going ahead at full tilt for years in the *maquiladoras*.

The effects of ratification of Nafta are similarly being exaggerated. Nafta will not substantially resolve or augment the problems of

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the US economy. The Canadian experience vividly illustrates the consequences of seeing everything from a Nafta perspective.

Conflating the 1988 trade agreement between Canada and the United States with the poor performance of the Canadian economy, voters north of the border recently destroyed the Conservative Party, which had signed the agreement. The agreement has been very harmful to working people, but the real dagger plunged into the heart of the Canadian economy is not wielded exclusively by the signatories to the trade treaty. Do not forget John Crow, who has run Canada's central bank since 1987.

The agreement contributed to economic hard times in Canada, but Crow is the major villain of the piece. Crow, like his US counterpart, Alan Greenspan, who chairs the Federal Reserve board, is a zero-inflation zealot. He has held to a tight money policy, with catastrophic consequences.

Likewise, the main event in the US economy is not Nafta, but monetary policy and the deflationary strategy spearheaded by the Federal Reserve. The winners and losers from those policies will remain the same with or without Nafta. Much of the Nafta debate was shadow boxing or misrepresentation: how many jobs will the US lose or gain? Line up the various models and it's obvious that the economists are delaying, with wildly varying assumptions based on predictions verging on necromancy.

Every now and again, someone pipes up to say that maybe the left should support Nafta because, while wounding the American working class, it will help the poor and jobless in Mexico. But trade agreements always favour the strongest parties. Divide Mexico into three income categories and you have a third reasonably well-off, a third poor and a third poor to the level of total destitution. Nafta will favour the top third, and indeed here's where the true long-term effects of Nafta would be felt most, in the cultural-economic annexation of the Mexican middle class, watching English-language TV, shopping in the lookalikes of North American malls, running local outposts of northern businesses.

Nafta is, centrally, about protecting the rights of US and Canadian investors in Mexico and locking Mexico into a dependent path, foreclosing radical options forever. Some Mexican leftists argue that Mexico got locked into that course with the debt crisis of the 1980s. It was then that the US banks forced the privatisation of state enterprises, and demanded the repeal of labour rights and the forcing down of wages. The stage was set for the Salinas-Nafta model. On that model, Mexico must get the investment or perish, even though Nafta will savage the peasantry, certain to be forced off the land by the millions, undercut by cheap corn from the north.

At bottom, this has been a battle about sovereign democratic rights. The lines are clearly drawn between progressive coalitions, anchored in labour, against the Fortune 500 and their representative in the White House.

GREEN GAUGE

Vicky Hutchings finds the great thing about eco-tourism is that it makes her feel better about her package holiday

Going on a mindless package holiday to Gran Canaria is just the sort of thing to worry the greenish person, like myself, who secretly thinks they ought to know better. Yet that was all that was left—clearly everyone else had the same idea: to leave November behind and fly off into the sun. But an article in the latest issue of *In Focus** has cheered me up immensely. It looks at the phenomenon of "eco-tourism", and takes it for a spin around the block, only to dump it in some breakers' yard in disgust.

Brian Wheeler, a lecturer in tourism at Birmingham University, feels so strongly about the subject that he has already renamed it *ego*-tourism. What results from going on a "green" holiday is, he says, "the warm glow from our smug, smug halos". Why? It's because "now we, the thinking tourists, can behave much as before with a clear (well, opaque) conscience—the blame still lies essentially with the mass tourists".

The only green thing about this is that green is the colour of envy: "So the green-eyed serpent uncoils as we continually try to 'better' ourselves holiday-wise." Others may find themselves packed into planes to Gran Canaria, to dine on burgers and chips, and watch old episodes of *Fawlty Towers* in sea-front bars. But who can deny the one-up-personship of coming back from a trekking holiday along the Hinku valley in Nepal or going on a cruise to Antarctica? It is the old, snobbish tourist-versus-traveller divide coming back to haunt us. And eco-tourists (or travellers) are demanding newer, even less visited, far-off destinations—with the added dimension of being permitted to engage with an "uncorrupted" local culture. The problem of coping with the exponentially growing numbers of tourists is still not being dealt with seriously.

Incidentally, I was interested to read recently in the *New Scientist* of one American traveller to the Antarctic, who, having paid out thousands of dollars, was barred from leaving the ship soon after his arrival. His crime? He had been spotted kicking a seal—which, given its thick layer of blubber probably didn't feel a thing, and was attacking him at the time for coming too close. Peer pressure from his PC shipmates, apparently, drove the organisers into announcing and enforcing the ban. Another incident that has stuck in my mind was of the Australian who refused to go trekking in the rainforest with a certain local guide in Ecuador because the guide "killed and ate animals". Both stories seemed to sum up rather nicely the priorities of certain rich, western tourists—who not only want Arcadia, but their own definition of Arcadia.

An article on Belize in the same issue of *In Focus* shows why eco-tourism, by its very nature, destroys what makes it eco in the first place. Belize, a country with "high-brow" appeal for middle-class travellers, recently set out on the green route. Among the attractions on offer are a tropical rainforest, a barrier reef, plus a number of ancient Mayan monuments. Until recently, the country was rarely visited at all. Now the government has established nature and marine reserves, and is encouraging local people to play a part in the tourist industry that is bringing so much foreign wealth to the country.

The government's strategy, according to Ian Munt, from South Bank University, and Egbert Higinio, from the University of the West Indies, "is premised upon the concept of sustainability". All this has proved highly tempting to the right sort of tourist, and numbers have nearly tripled since 1985. To cope, a $50-million "sustainable development in Ambergris Caye" will have "at least one international hotel, two 'all-inclusive spa-hotels', three to five upscale lodges, two golf courses, town houses and villas, a thousand luxury homes, polo fields and stables". Presumably, the "involvement" of local people will be the usual sort of menial cleaning jobs.

The term eco-tourism, fear the authors, is now applied to any tourism in an attractive natural setting. And we all know what happens to such hitherto undiscovered settings when we start to tell our friends. Suddenly they become full of horrid people like ourselves, and we declare that it has all become awfully spoilt, and then we go off to find somewhere else to muck around with in turn.

In *An Ideal Profile of an Eco-Tourist*, Deirdre Evans-Pritchard and Sebastian Salazar define an eco-tourist as "a calm person who takes the last seat on the bus and studiously reads a book on the natural history of Costa Rica . . . He/She will probably communicate with environmental or conservationist groups and volunteer for fieldwork . . . Real eco-tourism promotes justice for people and nature."

It's the aroma of patronage that sticks in the craw: the "natural" and colourful indigenous peoples who must remain unspoiled for our enjoyment. Maybe purpose-built holiday towns in Gran Canaria aren't so bad at that. And I certainly didn't have to "volunteer" for any work, field or otherwise.

"In Focus", from Tourism Concern, Froebel College, Roehampton Lane, London SW15. £12 annual subscription

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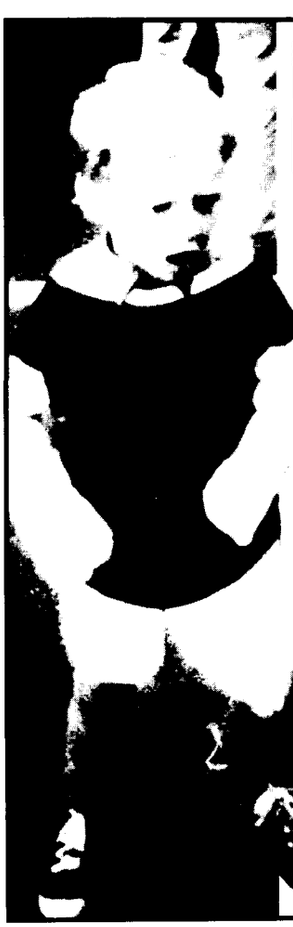

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Under the wild palms: François Chan as Greg in "The LA Plays"

Feisty Americans are sweeping our boards. As the special relationship blooms, **Aleks Sierz** gives a mixed blessing to US imports on the British stage

Atlantic soul stars

Some myths about theatre get worn away by the steady drip of doubts and scepticism, others are swept away by a current of decisive disproof. In the case of the adage about American plays not working in Britain, the tide has recently become a flood. Last year, John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* enjoyed both commercial success and snatched a fistful of awards. This year's most controversial play, David Mamet's *Oleanna*, is still outraging and exciting audiences in the West End.

The latest US import to the London fringe is 26-year-old Asian-American Han Ong, whose *The LA Plays* opened at the Almeida Theatre last week. Offering a radical look at American values from the margins of that much mythologised society, Ong portrays the alienation of Greg, a teenage Asian-American rent boy who drifts through the nightlife of Los Angeles, and thus ensures that his identity remains elusively transient. If, as Ong pointed out in the *New Yorker*, oriental genes give you no role models apart from kung fu artist or storekeeper, one response is the refusal of communication with mainstream society. Greg is a wanton outsider.

The trouble is that he has nothing new to say. With his mental luggage covered in postmodern clichés, Greg is not equipped for an original critique. Instead, he's condemned to wander through mundane meetings, fragments of dreams, fractured identities and banal desires. Under the set's electric palms, everyone aspires to be different but everyone ends up the same. In Ong's world, Hollywood rules LA.

Elsewhere, other examples of Americana are still burstin' out all over the British theatre scene: from the National Theatre's Rodgers and Hammerstein classic *Carousel*, where dark clouds disturb small-town optimism, to August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, another episode in his continuing saga about the long march of black Americans from the rural south to the urban north.

Fancy a rare play by cult bohemian Jane Bowles? It's more likely to be found in Hammersmith than in San Francisco. And some British dramatists, like the Richmond miniaturist Martin Crimp, now even write about the Big Apple in a style that's pure Manhattan.

Broadway's decline is London's gain. In New York, rising real estate values push up ticket prices with the result that, in Arthur Miller's words: "It's hard to be happy when you're laying out over $100 to sit down for two hours with a friend." Hence more and more American writers premier their work here. Miller himself chose the Young Vic to launch *The Last Yankee*, a disenchanted look at the American Dream through the eyes of female depression.

Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* is another London premiere, as is David Epstein's *Exact Change* (at the Lyric, Hammersmith): a wisecracking comedy about buddydom whose verbal shoot-outs barely conceal a deep longing for the traditional family. Its sharp dialogue and sitcom flavour are trademarks of much American drama. Scott McPherson's *Marvin's Room* dealt with incurable disease by means of comic exaggeration, while Wendy MacLeod's *The House of Yes* re-enacted JFK's assassination as sexual foreplay in an incestuous relationship.

The strengths of American drama—its feisty mouthing off, its sense of now, its expansive settings—are also its drawbacks. Too often these brash, brat-like plays rip across the surface of an issue without pausing to peer into its deeper implications. One reason for this may be Hollywood's influence on the writer's style. Howard Korder's *Search and Destroy*, set in airports, skyscrapers and wastelands, seems written with an eye to a film version. So if one-time playwrights such as Tom Topor and Ted Tally (*Silence of the Lambs*) have long deserted the stage for the screen, the good news is that *Angels in America* is to be filmed by Robert Altman.

While the British often seem to be, in the words of the *New York Times*' Frank Rich, "trapped in a dogged naturalism", the Americans freely vent their joy in theatricality. Not only Tony Kushner, but also Canada's Robert Lepage demonstrate the possibilities of a drama full of visual virtuosity, dream elements and expressive movement. Meaning is not just a matter of words.

American theatre turns issues, especially ethnic ones, into both a form of entertainment and an airing of anxieties. Larry Kramer, who wrote the screenplay for *Women in Love*, abandoned celluloid for the stage because it allowed him a more militant voice in Aids dramas such as *The Normal Heart* and *The Destiny of Me*. Anna Deavere Smith's one-woman show explores the conflict between New York's blacks and Jews; and all of August Wilson's plays tell of how blacks made their own history, though not in circumstances of their own choosing.

Is American drama, as Matt Wolf of *Variety* claims, "invigorated by the end of the Reagan-Bush years"? Perhaps. It has certainly graduated from diaper drama (kids getting even with their parents) to grappling with deeper issues. And as American English, in all its dialects, challenges the toneless suburb-speak of much West End drama, the main problem is the occasional wobble as British thespians struggle to get their tongues around an unfamiliar accent.

If London's image as theatre capital of the world survives imminent Arts Council surgery, this will in part be due to the cultural special relationship. US writers are pumping new blood into a theatre system unsure of just how ill it is.

Part 2 of "Angels in America" opens on 20 November at the National Theatre; "The LA Plays" run until 27 November and "Exact Change" to 4 December

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Boyd Tonkin asks if London's ethnic history is really based on tolerance

Strangers and others

Some things never change. In the Museum of London's "Peopling of London" exhibition, we learn that in pre-Roman times "The Thames seems to have acted as a boundary between tribes". The procurator Gaius Julius Classicianus might have subdued the natives after Boudicca's revolt, but could he have ordered a cab to Brixton on a wet night? No way, governor.

It would be easy to come away from the Barbican feeling bullish about the capital's multi-ethnic past and present. The displays show that cosmopolitan settlement on the banks of the Thames has a 15,000-year history. Postwar waves of incomers from south Asia or the Caribbean merely turned a new leaf in a long volume. Within a single 100-yard stretch of the Blackstock Road in Finsbury Park, the organisers found African, Greek Cypriot, West Indian, Chinese, Lebanese, Jewish and Spanish-run businesses.

Using artefacts, documents and recorded interviews, the survey rubs its message home. Immigrants have enriched the city in every sense, often in the face of stubborn (even violent) resistance. From gorgeous Huguenot-made watches to the refugee passports of the 1930s, the relics speak their purpose. Post-1945, coherence tends to break down into a blizzard of ephemera. You'll learn more about today's hybrid citizens watching *The Buddha of Suburbia* than from Notting Hill Carnival posters and NF newsletters.

"A liberal tradition?" worries the final text, unsure in the end whether the whole business amounts to a story of warm welcomes, cool indifference or outright hostility. After all, anti-foreign pogroms have pockmarked London's history, from the slaughter of Jews in 1189 to skinhead thuggery now. These exhibits can never prove that proximity alone fosters tolerance. For years, racist paper-sellers have wandered past that urban historians' cliché in Brick Lane—once a Huguenot church, then a synagogue, now a mosque—without seeing the error of their ways.

No visitor could fail to learn from this ingenious and moving show—though the kitsch pub joanna on the background tape was well out of order. And if it skirts around the economic inequity that lets bigotry breed, consider the surroundings. The City has a less than spotless history when it comes to outsiders. In 1731, when London already had a large multi-cultural population, the Lord Mayor proclaimed, certainly in vain, that "for the future no Negroes or other Blacks be suffered to be bound Apprentices at any of the Companies of this City" (see Peter Linebaugh's great study of 18th-century law and disorder, *The London Hanged*). Even today, one well-known City employer has a reputation for being less than keen on black job-seekers.

Around 1700, natives complained that you only heard French in Spitalfields. Today, it's Sylheti. Simply cross Bishopsgate into the pharaonic Broadgate complex and you enter another, all-white world. London has seldom needed formal rules or ghettoes to keep its tribes apart. The relative weight of citizens' wallets usually does the trick well enough.

"The Peopling of London" continues at the Museum of London to 15 April; more details of educational events from 071-600 0807

Rainbow coalition: a Greek Cypriot grocery in Green Lanes, Haringey

Jonathan Romney admires the cool precision of Japanese bloodshed

Designer mayhem

It's been a full-time occupation this year puzzling out the whys and wherefores of movie violence. Observers of critical fads may remember the so-called "New Violence", a putative micro-genre that cropped up on the strength of maybe three films: *Reservoir Dogs, Man Bites Dog, Bad Lieutenant.* My own defence of these films hinged on the argument that, by representing violence, they forced viewers to question their own investment in violent spectacle. A touch didactic perhaps, but I'll stand by it.

I'm less sure, though, what kind of argument could account for the work of Japanese director Takeshi Kitano, which is infinitely more cold-blooded, but curiously less disturbing. The nastiness that goes on in his films would give Quentin Tarantino pause; but its coolness definitely thrills rather than shocks. Takeshi's violence is distanced by a formalistic style that presents moments rather than continuity. The obvious thing to say is that this owes something to the influence of *manga* comics, but that may be something of a knee-jerk reaction to the new Japanese cinema.

Takeshi is a strange phenomenon, one of Japan's biggest stars, and as an actor, director, gameshow host, sports commentator and stand-up comic, he should have covered all the bases. But in the films, he seems to have one immutable persona: the apparently impassive hard man on the edge of craziness.

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Go on, make my day: the badder lieutenant goes east, in style

In *Sonatine* (due to open in April 1994) he's a *yakuza* who high-tails it with his gang to the seaside after a particularly brutal showdown. He and his men cool their heels playing Frisbee and doing silly dances until the action blows up again. The sporadic outbursts of violence are matched only by the loudness of the Hawaiian shirts. But the violence seems all the more startling for being discreetly masked much of the time.

A shoot-out is seen only as a blaze of light in a distant window; a casual massacre goes on out of frame while a bunch of guys in suits look bored. It's not quite like *Reservoir Dogs*, in which the camera famously moves away so as not to witness the ear slicing. That was an attempt to build squeamishness into the viewing. In *Sonatine*, it's more like matter-of-factness taken to an extreme: as though bloodshed were so banal it's hardly *worth* showing. And that engenders a cynical humour: boredom in the face of extremity.

Having seen *Sonatine* before *Violent Cop* (at the ICA Cinema from 19 November), I had this humourous approach in mind, otherwise I might have been tempted to take the chill of *Violent Cop* deadly seriously and seen its bloodshed as "Zen violence". The violence is, however, definitely blank—quite literal. It doesn't *stand* for anything, as it does in Abel Ferrara's parable of Christian perdition. It's just violence, straight no chaser.

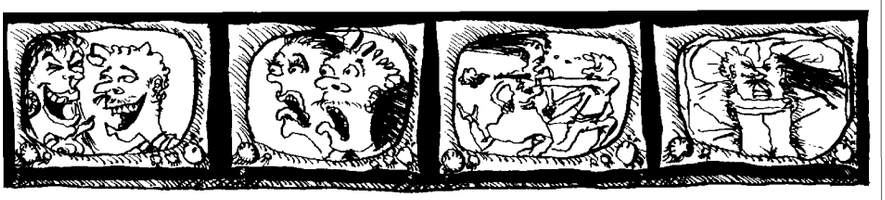
Violent Cop is perhaps the most confusing introduction to Takeshi because it's so low-key—or rather, it starts off low-key before it works up to an elegant frenzy. As Sergeant Azuma, Takeshi is at once self-effacing and narcissistic. The middle-aged, bandy-legged, rather chubby cop is pretty unglamorous, despite the vague resemblance to John Garfield. Yet he's the source of energy in the film, flaring up with a robotic impassiveness that Charles Bronson would envy.

Azuma gives Harvey Keitel's bad lieutenant a run for his money. But the lieutenant in Ferrara's film is bad because he's falling apart. No gin-swilling, crack-pipe degeneration is necessary for Azuma. He's excessively together, which in cop films is the sure sign of a walking time bomb.

The intrigue—a standard loner-versus-corruption tale—is inconsequential. What's important is the style and the pacing. Takeshi's style is diametrically opposed to the wham-bam insanity of Hong Kong favourite John Woo. Practically nothing happens, but when it does, it's with the stylised precision of a Bresson film. It's violence abstracted to such a degree that it hardly elicits any reaction at all; no thrill except the thrill of having expectations finally discharged. This is violence contemplated rather than staged.

And it makes for remarkable viewing, although perhaps not as remarkable as *Sonatine*. More on Takeshi when that film's released. Just to boil his work down to the violence is like saying that Jean-Pierre Melville made thrillers about hats. True, but only part of the story. This case is pending.

JACI STEPHEN



Could "Wild Palms" be a subversive cult metaphor ripe for decoding? Or could it be a pile of coconuts?

It's often said that a cult is considerably less than a minority. The word "subversive" also carries connotations of cult status and, in addition, implies a complete lack of comprehension within the cult towards the object of its adulation. The short-of-understanding then resort to the use of words such as "metaphor": the idea being that if they can't comprehend the thing they're supposed to, they'll pretend it's only a roundabout means of expressing something else that they do understand.

If they fail to find a metaphor in the material, they can resort to techniques of "decoding", which is a euphemism for "somebody-tell-me-what-the-goddam-hell-this-shit's-all-about". Those who fail even to understand the tools of understanding can tune in to *The Late Show* (BBC2, weekdays), where these and many more such terms are explored regularly with a syrup-of-figs-like ease.

Monday's edition was such a programme, when a panel discussed the decoding, the subversiveness, the cult appeal and, heaven forbid, the "social reality" of Oliver Stone's five-part serial, *Wild Palms* (BBC2, Monday, Tuesday). Stone is one of several Hollywood directors currently working in television (along with Barry Levinson and Steven Spielberg) and this is his first production.

Made by ABC, which also brought us *Twin Peaks* (subversive, cult show, blah, blah), Stone's brief was to make something "groundbreaking and fresh". The lesson ABC learned from *Twin Peaks* was, he said, to "End it before it goes on too long." If that advice had really been heeded, *Wild Palms* would not have made it to the end of the first hour. By the end of Tuesday's episode (a "bonus" introductory offer this week), the question was not how or when the thing would end, but how it had the audacity to begin in the first place.

So what do we have so far? A rhinoceros, an abduction, a man who has nightmares, a psychotic boy, a dumb girl, a corrupt senator and a virtual-reality soap called *Church Windows*. Billed as a thriller and set in Los Angeles in 2007 (it was originally a surreal cartoon strip in *Details* magazine), *Wild Palms* stars James Belushi as Harry Wyckoff, a man who dreams about a rhino and might just as well be married to one, for all the charisma of his wife Grace (Dana Delany). They have a son, Coty (Ben Savage), and a daughter whose only words are "Everything must go." No arguments there.

The "plot", such as it is, centres on two strange sects, the Fathers and the Friends. On the side of the Fathers are . . . er . . . (don't take my word for this), Coty, Senator Kreutzer (Robert Loggia), Grace's mother Josie (Angie Dickinson) and Paige Katz (Kim Cattrall). The Friends consist of . . . er . . . presumably, everyone else. Occasionally, when someone upsets the Fathers, they receive a visit, during which their eyes are plucked out. The Friends are more friendly (so far).

All are after one thing: control of the virtual-reality revolution. Channel 3 can bring a TV soap into your living room by projecting holograms onto your sofa; the Senator runs Channel 3. Grace, who is on the side of the Friends, slit her wrists in depression, when she suspected her husband was having an affair with a hologram. No prizes for guessing which side is winning the war.

Harry, naturally, is seeing a shrink about his nightmares, which compared to the world of virtual reality are a laugh a minute. In one, he went down a trap door in his swimming pool and entered "the tunnel the Friends built". There, he was told some unsettling things about his marriage. Gosh. Cut to reality: Coty is murdering a large fat man.

The series has been compared to *Twin Peaks*, but it lacks that series' characterisation, wit and haunting atmosphere. *Twin Peaks* characters were distinctive and weird; *Wild Palms* presents a cast of caricatures from every sci-fi film you've ever seen. Viewers never craved meaning in *Twin Peaks*; the experience was all. In *Wild Palms*, you're never far enough away from reality to enjoy the experience for its own sake and indulge in unreality.

The dangerous sexual undercurrent that ran through *Twin Peaks* is also attempted here, but fails. When Harry kisses Paige, the only look in his eyes is one of terror in case her black wig falls off during the scene. He can't get it up at all when he's with his wife, but with that rhinoceros horn bobbing around the house, you can't blame the poor guy for feeling inadequate.

So what does it all mean? And does anyone care? On *The Late Show*, presenter Sarah Dunant suggested that the Friends v Fathers sects might be a metaphor for Fascism vs Liberalism (afraid that one passed me by, Sarah). Technology expert Ben Woolley declared it a metaphor that has "got its finger on reality". And Sarah LeFanu said she'd rather watch *Red Dwarf*. I'd rather be a red dwarf than have to sit through another minute.

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Market forces

FREE TO HATE: THE RISE OF THE RIGHT IN POST-COMMUNIST EASTERN EUROPE
Paul Hockenos
Routledge, £19.99

David Cesarani

In every one of the former communist states in eastern Europe, neo-fascist parties are reaping between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of the vote in local and national elections. Racist violence and discrimination against ethnic minorities is endemic.

This may be taking place in far-off countries of which we know little, but the Berlin-based journalist Paul Hockenos forcefully points out that the west has a lot at stake in eastern Europe. Political conditions there discourage western investment, so leaving potential markets undeveloped. The harassment of minorities sends waves of refugees towards western Europe, fuelling its own right-wing extremists. At its worst, in former Yugoslavia, the fervid nationalism of the post-communist regimes can lead to civil war and inter-state conflict. But where did all this hatred come from?

Hockenos shows that none of the postwar communist regimes adequately confronted the legacy of Nazism. When it suited them, doctrinaire Marxists readily manipulated racism and national chauvinism. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), de-Nazification was skin deep. The official ideology of anti-fascism disguised the replication of authoritarian structures typical of the Third Reich. In spite of the slogans of amity towards the third world, foreign workers were segregated from the German population.

Throughout the Eastern Bloc during the 1950s and 1960s, state-sponsored anti-Zionism perpetuated anti-Jewish stereotypes. Poland excelled in this respect, despite the virtual extinction of its prewar Jewish population. Elsewhere, Gypsies replaced Jews. Hungary systematically discriminated against its Roma minority. Romania's communist rulers favoured the Roma, but tormented ethnic Hungarians.

Ironically, the first manifestations of neo-fascism took the form of oppositional movements. The skinhead groups that emerged in the early 1980s in the GDR, Hungary and Czechoslovakia adopted Nazi slogans precisely to defy the official anti-fascist ethos. A corps of dedicated neo-Nazis emerged from the chrysalis of rebellious youth, frequently assisted by West German comrades.

These elements concern Hockenos less than the general rightward drift of post-communist politics. He maintains that the revolutions of 1989 were only superficially democratic. Anti-communism quickly merged with nationalism as the sole legitimating ideology of the new regimes.

Apart from the Czechs, who had a viable interwar model of civic society to which they could refer, east European politicians seized on concepts of the ethnic nation to justify their rule. Strong government and unity was necessary for a strong nation. Pluralism and minority rights were held to be divisive, enervating tendencies that had to be contained.

So what's new? Magazine cover from May 1992 by Roman Cieslewicz, from Margo Rouard-Snowman's anthology of the Polish designer's work (Thames & Hudson, £24.95)

With great expertise, Hockenos demonstrates that western notions of "right" and "left" have become inoperative in eastern Europe. Free-market liberals, the "right-wing" shock troops of change in 1989-90, have been largely stymied by conservative nationalists who prefer slower economic reform and greater state intervention. Yet these "leftists", many of them ex-communists, are chauvinistic and authoritarian.

As disillusion with economic reform and democracy set it, nationalism and racism became vehicles for protest. Despite the virtual absence of Jews in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Poland, anti-Semitism began to function as a discourse against westernisation, modernisation and the free market. Right-wingers now characterise the IMF, the EC, and western capitalism as an "international conspiracy" against their peoples.

Hockenos hopes this grim process is not irreversible. He argues that legal measures against racism and an honest reckoning with history, combined with a more sensitive application of economic reforms, may drain the sources of right-wing support. Rather more fancifully, he pleads for a revival of social democracy and a pluralistic vision of the nation. What is needed is nothing less than the redefinition of the nation state. It may be asking too much of the battered political cadres of eastern Europe to expect them to start experimenting with regional identities, devolution and participative democracy.

With greater realism and justice, Hockenos chastises the west for refusing ex-Warsaw Pact countries meaningful economic aid or EC and Nato membership. He remarks angrily that the IMF has inflicted on their vulnerable political systems social and economic shocks that it would not dream of making western nations suffer.

Yet should the west financially underwrite former communist countries if they are as brutally nationalistic as Hockenos shows them to be? He suggests linking aid to the enforcement of human rights, but wouldn't this just validate the nationalists' claim that they are being bullied by the west?

In any case, what model does the west have to offer to the east? For the past decade in Britain, France and, pre-eminently, Germany, government figures have been wrapping themselves in the flag. Unless we curb the pervasive nationalistic rhetoric and racist immigration policies within "Fortress Europe", we can hardly expect eastern Europeans to adopt "sweetness and light" as their governing principle.

Most seriously, is Hockenos correct that people in eastern Europe will turn to nationalist and xenophobic parties as their saviours? The recent elections in Lithuania and Poland indicate that they prefer reformed, competent ex-communists to the wild men of the right or hell-for-leather free marketeers. Whoever can manage economic transition and deliver the goods will hold power. Rather than flag-waving and minority-bashing it is, as elsewhere, "the economy, stupid".

Hockenos' grim picture will confirm the worst expectations of pessimists and the preconceptions of those with an uncritical regard for western parliamentary democracy. For nearly 50 years, the Warsaw Pact was western Europe's "other". The iron curtain provided an uncritical reflection of the glories of capitalism, democracy and pluralism. There is some risk that *Free to Hate* will serve a similar purpose. However, rather than confirming our own sense of superiority, some may detect an unpleasing mimesis in the antics of post-communist politicians who took Mrs Thatcher and Chancellor Kohl as role models.

Ultimately, Hockenos supplies a snapshot of a rapidly changing scene. His historical analysis, peppered with telling anecdotes, is unquestionably the best part of this fine book. Optimists may seize on recent developments and treat it as a brilliant account of the most painful stage in the emergence of democracy in eastern Europe. But if it all goes horribly wrong, no one will be able to say that we were not warned.

David Cesarani is director of the Wiener Library

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Ascending the scale

VERDI: A BIOGRAPHY
Mary Jane Phillips-Matz
Oxford University Press, £30

Nicholas Till

For many years, even his closest associates didn't know whether Verdi was actually married to his long-time partner, Giuseppina Strepponi. Notoriously taciturn and secretive, he has proved fertile but treacherous ground for biographers.

Which Verdi, for one thing? The popular composer of rum-ti-tum hits such as *Rigoletto* and *Il Trovatore*, whose music has only relatively recently attracted the attention of serious scholars? The political radical, artistic voice of the Risorgimento and deputy in the first Italian parliament? Or the Verdi of his own preferred guise as humble man of the soil: the reluctant composer, theatre-shy and always happiest when back at home managing his farm?

Mary Jane Phillips-Matz engages most successfully with this latter Verdi in her monumental biography, on which she has been working for some 30 years. During much of this time she lived in the region of Emilia, where Verdi himself spent most of his life from birth to death. She knows the land intimately, evoking it with such loving detail that we come to know not only every inch of Verdi's substantial estate at Sant'Agata, but also the lives of the peasants who worked it.

This, she reminds us, is Bertolucci country, where the film *1900* was shot. As she demonstrates, Verdi retained an intuitive understanding of the rural working classes. He was always alert to tremors of social discontent, fierce in his condemnations of injustice and bureaucratic pettiness, and dispensed considerable sums in charitable projects. Here we recognise the spirit behind operas such as *La Traviata* and *Simon Boccanegra*.

Phillips-Matz has unearthed much material to adjust the received picture that Verdi so carefully put about: of the down-to-earth peasant artist, the poor boy made good who seems to make an obligatory appearance in the mythology of all young nations. She upwardly relocates the social status of Verdi's parents, demonstrates that his own education was more comprehensive than he admitted and even shows that he was not actually born in the farmhouse venerated since 1901 as a national monument. She has an eye for colourful period detail and the book is studded with revealing nuggets of information.

She first published some of these revisions to the official version as long ago as 1966, and they have since entered the mainstream of Verdi biography. That's rough on the author. But does it really matter in which precise farmhouse Verdi was born? Probably not (although it would have been interesting to speculate on why Verdi was content to endorse the mistake). Indeed, how much else in a biography of this kind *really* matters if it does not serve to illuminate the works? There is little attempt here to employ Verdi's operas as possible documents of his internal life, or to reflect on how reappraisal of Verdi's outward life might alter our view of them.

Although there are frequent references to events as they impinged upon Verdi, the more general political and social context of his work is inadequately explained. The major players on the historical stage with whom Verdi came into contact—Mazzini, Giusti, Cavour—are but sketchily presented.

Perhaps Phillips-Matz feels that this task was adequately undertaken in George Martin's 1963 biography. But there has been much re-appraisal of the Risorgimento since then, and Verdi's role needs comparable reassessment.

Only mindless piety could prevent one from admitting that the real significance of most of Verdi's early operas—up to *Luisa Miller*, his 15th—lies in the role they played in the development of Italian national consciousness. For all Verdi's merciless hectoring of his librettists, the dramaturgy in these works is often crude. Characterisation is sacrificed to the tyrannical conventions of Italian opera. Melodic inspiration is fitful, and only at the end of his career did Verdi's orchestration reach anything like the subtlety of Rossini, 50 years earlier. We still need to understand better the circumstances in which these works were written, and the complex motivations of the man who created them.

This is a handsome book, enjoyable to read, with its material well organised and effectively laid out. But, diverted by her efforts to demolish some of the less important aspects of Verdi mythology, Phillips-Matz has perhaps allowed him to lead her too far up his own garden path.

Nicholas Till's "Mozart and the Enlightenment" is published as a Faber paperback

Indian reserve

THE HOLDER OF THE WORLD
Bharati Mukherjee
Chatto & Windus, £14.99

Wendy Brandmark

Beigh Masters is an "asset hunter". She pursues lost treasures for unscrupulous clients, "uniting people and possessions . . . like matching orphaned socks, through time". But it is the hidden story of Hannah Easton, the "Salem Bibi", the Puritan concubine of a Hindu king, that obsesses her.

Hannah is a small child in a colonial outpost in Massachusetts when her mother disappears one night with her Nipmuc Indian lover. Hannah keeps the secret of her mother's flight; everyone assumes she was killed in the Indian massacres. She moves to Salem with her adoptive parents, an upright Puritan couple, and grows up to be a dutiful daughter, quietly biding her time until Gabriel Legge—an adventurer, a braggart and a charmer—marries her and takes her to the Coromandel coast in India.

Gabriel, a factor for the East India Company, soon becomes part of a mad scene of entrepreneurs, political schemers and pirates: "The British had not come to India . . . to breed and colonize. They were there to plunder." For Hannah, the colour and variety of life in India compensates for her husband's absences, for the attentions of the cruel and repulsive Chief Factor and the hurtful gossip of the other company wives.

She is her mother's daughter, has inherited her sensuality and courage, and will repeat her history. After she is given sanctuary in his palace during a night of Muslim riots, she seduces Raja Singh. Distracted by his new concubine, the Hindu king does not heed the Moghul emperor's threat to his kingdom until it is too late. Hannah survives the battle, returns to Salem and bears his child.

This is an intelligent, passionate novel, yet one whose story is told rather than dramatised, whose narrator's tone is as dry and restrained as the manners of her Puritan ancestors. By the end we know only slightly more about Beigh Master's life and her desires. Though she is the descendant of a stowaway on a ship bound for Salem in 1632, though she has crossed race and cultural lines to live with her Indian lover Venn, she can scarcely be compared to Hannah or Hannah's mother.

She takes no risks, living vicariously through the adventures of the "Salem Bibi". She is a time tourist; drawn back into a moment of Hannah's history through her lover's database, she is overwhelmed by the horror and beauty, the bloody end to Hannah's affair. Perhaps we can only believe in such a remarkable tale if it is told by someone so cautious and cunning, so coolly obsessive.

Mukherjee is a wonderful storyteller whose 17th-century Salem and India seem more real than the pale glimpses we have of contemporary America. She is always showing us coincidences and connections: the Moghul emperor whose symbol of power is a golden globe cupped in a gold replica of his hands, and the Indian academic who holds "virtual reality", the data of all time, on his computer; Hannah Easton and the heroine of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, both women ostracised by a hypocritical Puritan society as much for their power as their adulterous passion; the perfection, the frozen time, the world in miniature celebrated in Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn", and realised in the vivid details of an Indian painting.

But Mukherjee stresses not the similarities between disparate cultures but their dependence on each other. Even the Europeans in India cannot fail to be changed by those they exploit. What disgusts, excites, frightens and infuriates us about "the other" is what we most desire for ourselves: our exotic truths, our "unheard melodies".

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New American fiction

Weird and wonderful

Laurence O'Toole

Though it's clearly been America's century in fiction, lately the going has been rather tough. It's hard being a writer: squaring-up to post-modern paralysis, to ironic burn-out. How do you deal with all that speed and surface?

"You don't", seems to be a common response, "you escape": into psycho-killer schlock, if you're Bret Easton Ellis, or into arcadia and blockbuster deviancy if you're Donna Tartt. The past can also be a pretty good place to hide out. At least things made sense back then. In *Crazy in Alabama* (Viking, £9.99), **Mark Childress** plumps for the summer of 1965.

Industry, Alabama, is the kind of backwoods town where nothing ever happens until everything happens. Young Peejoe's aunt cuts off her husband's head, goes to Hollywood and makes a splash. Meanwhile, Peejoe finds himself in the thick of the fury and hoo-ha of the black civil rights struggle. There's plenty of lying and lynching, but no mistaking who the good guys are and what kind of station-wagons the villains drive.

This is fine, old-style entertainment; fast, comic and a pleasure to read. But it's sheer comfort. The one truly unsettling moment comes at the start. A grown-up Peejoe sits numbed in front of a large video screen, viewing and reviewing snippets from Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. The vertigo is for now—"Well, how did I get here?"—which is when the past comes ringing down the phone, and the search for the missing threads begins.

William T Vollmann is a writer of peculiar talent, but these particular threads are not his concern. Vollmann is his own man, writing for his own queer amusement. With *Butterfly Stories* (André Deutsch, £9.99), he takes time out from his seven-volume symbolic history of North America to deliver a dark fable on contemporary excess. One wonders why he bothered. Vollmann airlifts his wretched Butterfly Man to a steamy south Asian hell of boozing, whoring and aching balls, to watch him get infected and die.

It is not a very nice book: thrown together, and a pain to read. Vollmann is a man out of time, squatting miserably at the wrong end of the wrong century, sniffing wearily at the diseased state of things. You worry that this disgusted whimsy could be the front end of a new bandwagon. The New Dandyism: authors who write like angels but talk dirty, delighting in bad taste.

Gary Indiana is not a New Dandy. There may be plenty of decadence and decay in his books, but it is transformation he's after. Indiana works with artifice. His writing is saturated in "fictions", and with *Gone Tomorrow* (Hodder & Stoughton, £9.99), he plunges headlong into cinema kitsch. The whole novel is one long flashback as a pair of friends meet in a New York hotel to discuss the death by Aids of Paul, a German director.

Rewind to 1984, and a time of innocence: "We lived a certain way six or seven years ago and then things changed." Deep in the Columbian jungle, "the asshole of the world", Paul is making an art movie with its cast of "instant characters": the hustler, the ageing diva, the drug smuggler, the ex-Nazis. Exhaustion and extinction pervade the air. Paranoia mounts: a local beggar takes a senseless beating; a juicy cockroach is crushed under a stiletto heel. There's talk of a serial vampire killer on the loose.

We wait for something nasty to happen, while sort of knowing it won't. Indiana's horror isn't for real. Leaving the jungle, he moves on seven years, heading for the necropolis. Aids has come to town; people are dropping like so many flies: "I should pitch a tent in the cemetery, since everyone will end up there eventually."

Although he permits his "victims" some messy human dimension, Indiana requires that they move through various stock cinematic routines: the one from *Night Porter* mixing Nazism and sex; the spooky clinic straight out of Fassbinder's *Veronika Voss*. There's the bitter finale with a nefarious dame and a disputed will.

It's raining camp; a flood of kitsch, to point up how kitsch seems to have got a stranglehold on emotions. Indiana rifles sentiment in order to desentimentalise Aids: "to stop the worst sort of people from dragging out the violins". It's at this point, when meaning comes shining through artifice, that the excess of camp, words, characters, even themes seems worth it. There's something weird and wonderful about what Gary Indiana does, and one's caveats simply fade away.

Early Fellini: Guilietta Masina and Anthony Quinn in "La Strada", from Robert Sklar's authoritative, superbly designed and easy-to-use "Film: an international history of the medium" (Thames & Hudson, £32)

Addio, Féfé

FELLINI
John Baxter
Fourth Estate, £20

Robert Carver

When three journalists complained to Fellini that he had told them all different versions of the same event, the director became genuinely aggrieved: "All of you got an exclusive story. What's wrong with that? I'm a liar, but an honest one."

How then do you write a book about a man who always distorted and exaggerated reality, his own life as much as the myths about the making of his films? John Baxter's wise strategy had been to talk to everyone else about Fellini, leaving the maestro himself with a walk-on role at the end, neither confirming nor denying all the book contains.

An earlier would-be biographer, Gideon Bachmann, eventually wrote both questions and answers after fruitlessly waiting for the master to respond. He gave the resulting forgery to Fellini, who never read it. "But does it contribute to the myth?" was all he wanted to know. "Yes", replied Bachmann. "Then print it." Pure *fellinismo*.

"Everything around me is fake," complained the actor Vilallonga on the set of *Guilietta of the Spirits*. "Just like life," replied Fellini. He was nothing if not consistent in his nihilism.

It was not always so funny. Jibes about his fading virility on the set of *Citta delle donne* led Ettore Manni, who played the seducer of 10,000 women Dr Katzone ("big-cock"), to shoot himself to death through the genitals dressed in full cowboy rig. "Well, it proves the script works," was Fellini's reaction.

This study is both biography and filmography; the two inevitably intertwined, as movies were Fellini's whole life. Verifiable fact is laced with gossip, opinion and conjecture to trace the *auteur* to end all *auteurs*:

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wilful, charming, sadistic, the gaudy medieval anti-Pope of Cinécitta. The result is the best study of the man and the movies yet. There is much new material here, and the character of the Great Mythologiser emerges more fully than ever before. Descriptions of unused sections to Fellini classics such as *8½* make fascinating reading.

Baxter has also drawn out of the shadows the legions of helpers and collaborators that thronged the Roman sets, cafés and backlots. Not just the obvious, such as Rossellini, Pasolini, Antonioni, but vital writers such as Flaiano and Pinelli, crucial lighting cameramen, and of course the composer Nino Rota. Fellini's chief asset in assembling his court was a flagrant charm. He would insult, traduce, reduce to tears his actors, producers and backers. Then he would kiss and make up, wooing them back into the fold.

He held together an anarchic empire of talented and talentless wastrels, celebrated intellectuals, craftsmen and lounge-lizards—without an office, proper salaries or even scenarios for most of the time. Mastroianni demanded a script in *La Dolce Vita* and was handed a bound copy of blank pages—with a single drawing by Fellini of a man paddling himself to a desert island with his outsize penis. Mastroianni admitted defeat. "I don't have problems with actors," Fellini stated. "Actors have problems with me."

Out of prewar Italy, Fellini distilled his iconography from the *fumetti* photocomics, Hollywood glamour, fascist pomp and small-town farce. From the 1950s he embraced Neorealism to undermine it from within. The sombre images of *Il Bidone* and *La Strada* point the way forward to *Satiricon* and *E la nave va*, not back to Rossellini. He belonged to a generation and a milieu that had lost faith in almost everything except success and self-indulgence masquerading as liberation.

Under the torrent of verbiage, the egotism and ambivalent sexual gambols runs a thick vein of despair. From Snaporaz to Casanova, his male protagonists can see no purpose in existence except empty sensuality. His women are vast-dugged monsters or sex dolls with Venus-flytrap vaginas. Underneath the circus greasepaint thuds a pulse pessimistic enough to warm the heart of any Anglo-Saxon miserabilist.

Italians do not much care for their satirists. Fellini has never been as popular with intellectuals at home as either Visconti or Rossellini, both of whom took things Italian seriously rather than sending up the gamey, gullible land of tarts, spivs and liquifying saint's blood.

Hubris was invented for such as Fellini. Only the absurd, the vulgar fart from the clown amid the solemnity of the Eternal City, kept the maestro from disaster. He seemed to float clear of financial shipwrecks, popping up again, fresh and breezy, for the next production. Harold Wilson's celebrated dictum about the national economy being child's play compared to film financing applies to the Italian industry in triplicate spades.

Films acknowledged to be masterpieces of world cinema were sketched out in cafés at midnight and shot amid chaos. The descriptions of Fellini's shoots would reduce your average BBC director to a gibbering heap. Pimps, astrologers, decadent aristos, hippies: all were welcome in the cast or the entourage. Unions, regulations and everything that got in the way was blithely ignored.

The post-*Dolce Vita* era saw Fellini with international acclaim, if frequently short of production money. Many of his former helpers departed for careers of their own. Narrative drive and complex psychology were never Fellini's strong points. Once the acerbic Flaiano had left, a natural tendency to sentimentalise and trivialise took over. Of the late films only *Amarcord* escapes vapidity.

Mad, bad and apparently delightful to know, the old sinner brought to mind both Benvenuto Cellini and Cesare Borgia. Cinema belongs to madmen, and my only regret is that no one ever brought Féfé across to bite our own dour, insular, kitchen-sink-*verismo* generals of the screen.

Requiescat in excelsis, Caro Federico.

Good grief

A TIDEWATER MORNING: THREE TALES FROM YOUTH
William Styron
Jonathan Cape, £12.99

Fraser Harrison

In his last book, *Darkness Visible*, an account of his descent into depression, Styron describes how he reached the point of deciding to commit suicide. In the event, he was saved on what might have been the last night of his life by hearing on television a contralto voice singing the Brahms *Alto Rhapsody*. This sound pierced his heart like a dagger, and he reviewed all the joys his house had known, realising that he could not abandon these memories nor the people bound to them. The next day he had himself admitted to hospital.

The onset of his illness was in 1985 and the *via dolorosa* of his collapse and gradual recovery took many months. This is his first and therefore very welcome book since *Darkness Visible*, and it contains two novellas that belong to the period of his ordeal. The third, entitled "Shadrach", though thematically close, dates from 1978.

While struggling to recover, he concluded that the roots of his depression were in part genetic—his father had also been hospitalised—and in part the result of his "incomplete mourning" of his mother, who died when he was 13. He speculates that he may be one of those who was unable to achieve the catharsis of grief, and has consequently carried through his life an intolerable burden of rage and dammed-up sorrow that became the guns of self-destruction. If so, his last-minute avoidance of death may have been the product of belated homage to his mother, who

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People just like us? A spring festival in Quanzhou, China, from "The Sun: in myth and art" by Madanjeet Singh (Thames & Hudson, £29.95). This resplendent cross-cultural survey of stories and symbols is supported by Unesco (and hence not by Britain, which withdrew from the agency under Thatcher)

used to sing the Brahms piece.

These autobiographical confidences lend the greatest interest to the title story of this collection, which is also the best of the trio. Set in the area of Tidewater, Virginia, where Styron was brought up, the action takes place on a Sunday morning in 1938, the year Styron's mother died. The narrator, a 13-year-old boy, listens and watches while his mother endures the last hours of her fatal cancer.

Oppression bears down on the boy from every side. He is bullied by his employer, a penny-pinching racist for whom he delivers newspapers. History itself seems to oppress him, for that summer his papers have been carrying headlines announcing Hitler's bellicosity. Most oppressive of all is the presence of his sick mother in the house. He hears her screams and listens to his father's desperate attempts to persuade the doctor to strengthen her doses of morphine.

It seems that, like the suicide, he is encircled by malevolent fates. The only consolation he is offered strikes him as delusory: the healing of Jesus through a miracle. Nor does he identify with his father's drunken bitterness, expressed later in his abomination of God for allowing his wife to suffer. Instead, at his darkest hour, the boy surprises himself by defying his employer and throwing his papers in the river. PRAGUE AWAITS HITLER ULTIMATUM reads the submerging headline, but the boy has seized his destiny.

As he returns home, there is a heart-breaking moment of confusion when he hears his mother's voice singing Brahms, only to understand that it is a record and she is dead. By then, however, he has the power to acknowledge what has happened to him and his father.

All art acts to some degree as self-therapy, though therapy in itself seldom produces art. The material in this story suggests a therapeutic origin, but it is scarcely a piece of raw autobiography. Despite its equivocal ending, the boy is probably not a candidate for suicidal urges. The events described are redemptive and will allow him to complete his grief. Perhaps for Styron, too, they will bring about a long-awaited Tidewater mourning.

Nice people

READING NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
Catherine A Lutz and Jane L Collins
University of Chicago Press, £15.95

Vicky Hutchings

The history of the *National Geographic* is the tale of a paradox. The magazine has members, not subscribers; it purports to be about the exotic *other*, yet is really about America itself; its "mainstay and distinguishing feature" is photography, yet its photographs have been likened to the snaps of tourists; it is a journal of fact and record, yet "five penises were deleted" in the course of an article about the Nuba of Sudan by the simple editorial instruction: "Shorts to be added by engraver". And this was in 1966.

The *National Geographic* is the journal of the National Geographical Society, an amateur academic organisation started in 1888 by Gardiner Greene Hubbard, a Boston lawyer. The recognisable *Geographic* style, however, did not begin to emerge until after his death in 1897, when it was taken over by Alexander Graham Bell, of telephone fame and Hubbard's son-in-law, and Gilbert Hovey Grosvenor, *his* son-in-law.

At this time, photographs were still very much subservient to the text. But by 1905 Grosvenor had bitten the bullet and "published 11 full pages of photographs of Llasa". There was uproar. Yet "while a number of board members were shocked and angry, public response was overwhelmingly favourable". And public response has always been what really counted.

More than 30 million Americans read the *National Geographic* today, with a further seven million overseas. Of the US readers, 96 per cent are white, their average age is 42, and 30 per cent come from the top two social classes. Yet the magazine, like *Reader's Digest*, has a large number of middle- and working-class readers who use the magazine as a means of enlightenment and self-improvement. While ostensibly a scientific journal, the *National Geographic* is nothing if not mass entertainment for an American middlebrow audience, where "politeness is more marketable than politics". A staggering 53 per cent of this audience do no more than look at the pictures and read the captions.

Middle Americans know they won't get anything nasty in the *Geographic*. Indeed, the fifth principle announced to the board in 1915 was unflinching: "Nothing of a partisan or controversial nature is printed." Actually, the sixth principle is much more revealing: "Only what is of a kindly nature is printed about any country or people, everything unpleasant or unduly critical being avoided."

Indeed, so unpleasant did editors find those parts of the world that refused to follow the American way that "there was no coverage whatsoever of the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1959". As my mother used to say, if you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything.

What Americans especially like to read in the *National Geographic* is, as one staff member put it, "little critter" stories about furry animals, and pieces about the natural world. The reverence for wilderness has long been a part of the American psyche. And this has informed the way the rest of world has been served up for American consumption.

Mostly depicting people in rural settings, sometimes with megaworks like dams and bridges in the background to signify western-style progress, the photographs (until the late 1970s) "virtually eliminate[d] the ill, the pockmarked, the deformed or the hungry". Afterwards, such pictures were run small. Even when the portrait in question was of a Somali man suffering horribly with smallpox, there would be the inevitable "hint of a smile on the man's lips". Americans perused the *National Geographic* and found themselves safely reflected back. If there was poverty, then it was a natural, picturesque sort. The emphasis was on showing that "under the colourful dress and the skin, as it were, we are all more or less the same".

The central problem at the heart of the *Geographic*'s humanism, as this book points out, is that: "The message that we are all alike under the skin takes on a new meaning in a social context that denies that discrimination takes place or that race has been used to consolidate the privilege of some and oppress others." And yet . . . and yet . . .

It's easy to sneer, but one reader quoted made me pause: "My grandparents are basically uneducated farmers, and I love them dearly, but anyone who is dark-skinned is an A-rab. And I remember as a child, anyone that spoke differently or was coloured or was from any country, they were all lumped under one subtitle, A-rab. And to me that's in part

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of the founding principles of [the magazine] . . . just to bring the world together and to show us how we're dependent on each other and the planet itself."

This must one of the year's most fascinating books. As an afterthought, I found out the UK figures. Apparently, 320,000 issues are sold here, which means readership is well over one million. We clearly like this formula as well.

Desert shield

SPIDER'S WEB: BUSH, SADDAM, THATCHER AND THE DECADE OF DECEIT
Alan Friedman
Faber & Faber, £17.50

Simon Louvish

A few weeks ago, I complained in these columns about the flood of Desert Storm pop-up books. Now up pops the claimant to the definitive version of the scandal known as Iraqgate. The hype surrounding the book extends to the claim, in the *Observer*, that the author completed the book "protected round the clock by bodyguards armed with assault rifles." The review copy was delivered to my home by hooded motorcyclists, with Warthog tank- busting helicopters hovering above and snipers watching from every rooftop.

Publishers believe that such hyperbolic PR is *de rigueur* if they are to shift enough copies nowadays. But what we have here, under the promise of red-hot revelations, is a sober, rigorous work of first-class financial journalism. Almost exclusively, it covers the tangled tale of the Banco Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL) and its obscure branch in Atlanta, which became the conduit of choice for the big US tilt towards Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s.

Alan Friedman, award-winning journalist for the *Financial Times*, has pursued the classical gambit of "follow the money" and uncovered the paper trail leading through the US Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation, to Jordanian and Iraqi middlemen, and to arms-buying conduits stretching from Singapore to Santiago.

The chain connecting Carlos Cardoen, the Bechtel Corporation, Matrix Churchill, Italian bankers and Pentagon puppeteers followed the Reagan-Bush tilt towards Iraq, set out in the National Security Directive of 26 October 1989. It aimed at "economic and political incentives for Iraq" to "embrace Iraq in a coccoon of moderation" and, naturally, increase US influence. The web unravels due to the misadventures and trials of one Christopher Drogoul, the manager of BNL's Atlanta branch, whom the administration has ludicrously attempted to scapegoat as the sole author of all these illicit deals.

Friedman talks at the end of his book about the tendency to shrug off government malfeasance these days because "we are so inured to such behaviour that it almost doesn't matter". He warns about the abdication of responsiblity in the face of such weariness and cynicism: "What is at stake is nothing less than the truth". Yes. But the truth has become the first casualty not only of war but of the manipulations of "peace".

The extent to which the prosperity and stability of the "west" is dependent on arms sales to third world countries has been noted elsewhere. Even such a principled leader as Vaclav Havel has discovered that to keep his country afloat in hard times, he has had to "honour" arms deals with dictatorships. We are often beneficiaries of the lies that we so despise.

Investigations such as this inform us of what we already know. Can we proceed further? If we took the emerging pattern seriously, we should surely be calling for the criminal indictment of members of our current government, who have broken their own laws and conspired to send their own lackeys to jail. (I refuse to regard the machine-toolists of Matrix Churchill, who had no qualms in supplying the wherewithal for Saddam's military, nuclear and chemical capability, as "innocent" people.)

At the very least, such a person as William Waldegrave—who wrote on Iraq in October 1989: "I doubt if there is any future market on such a scale anywhere where the UK is potentially so well placed" and then pretended he didn't know the consequences—should not be allowed to run anything more harmful than a whelk stall, and that only under rigorous supervision. Not to speak of Major, Thatcher *et al*. But it is unlikely that the coming Scott Inquiry report will do more than offer a severe reprimand.

One tiny revelationin the text intrigues me personally. Friedman alleges, on the evidence of an anonymous "US intelligence officer", that super-terrorist Abu Nidal, previously HQ'ed in Iraq, was put out to grass (as it were) in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf war of 1991 with millions of dollars in hand to keep him out of the fray.

At that period, I and other campaigners were fighting to keep the British government from deporting seven Palestinians named by the Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker, as agents of an unnamed terrorist organisaton, which turned out to be the Nidal group.

The government later admitted all seven were innocent. But it struck me at the time that if scapegoats were being chosen at random, what happened to the real terrorists? If Friedman's version is true or even vaguely near truth (and there were indeed no terrorist attacks at the time, except by our local IRA), it provides more food for thought on the proposition that western security services collude with, rather than oppose, those transnational terrorist groups. The mysterious tangle of Lockerbie is another case in point.

Perhaps an enterprising UK journalist might wish to spend a summer "protected round the clock by armed bodyguards" in order to dig out this story? No? I'm not surprised. But we still owe Friedman a vote of thanks for his rigour, despite the excessive hype that undermines his cause.

PRINTOUT

Report back

Boyd Tonkin

When John Patten starts thinking, teachers will want to count the chalk. Not content with dumping a lorry-load of misleading raw data about exam performance on us, the education secretary has also been pondering the social cost of illiteracy. His lecture showed this champion of high standards to be an admirer of the skills of Sun leader writers: a group chiefly employed to tell what his namesake Chris used to call "porkies" on behalf of the Conservative Party.

As for any Tory, literacy to Patten largely means the delivery of functioning wage-slaves. "Employers need workers who can read complicated documents," he argues; they should be able to "write clear and structured reports". (He would never have got away with that near-meaningless "structured" on the Sun.)

If Patten does worry so much about literacy levels, he should now try to prevent Kenneth Clarke from imposing VAT on books in the Budget on Tuesday week. For a maximum estimated revenue of £271 million (or 0.5 per cent of the current deficit), VAT at 17.5 per cent would deter the neediest consumers from buying books for themselves and, even more important, for their children.

Add VAT to the gradual erosion of the Net Book Agreement, and you have what the other Patten would term a "double whammy". Projections by the Ravensbeck consultancy show that both measures combined would drive first many booksellers, and then many publishers, to the wall.

Then there's the school library service. Under local management, book budgets will soon become vulnerable to cuts in any difficult year. LEA schools could reclaim VAT on books; opted-out ones could not. Evidence from Canada reveals that a 7 per cent sales tax led to a 20 per cent drop in the turnover of educational books. Anyone but a Sun hack might think that a minister who cares about illiteracy would spend more time on such matters than on chasing those mythical 1960s slackers out of staff rooms.

No thanks to the government, which declined to create a Royal Commission, independent thinking on education does flourish beyond Whitehall. John Patten has already rejected two main proposals from Sir Claus Moser's team: universal nursery provision, and a wider spread of subjects at A level. So Britain will still share with Ghana (that other beacon of democracy) the world's narrowest post-16 exams. But for once, we can make up our own minds, since the Moser report will be sold in paperback ("Learning to succeeed"; National Commission on Education, £4.99). Though strictly non-party in its make-up and proceedings, the commission only left the drawing-board with funding from a trust set up by the Labour-supporting publisher Paul Hamlyn. Champagne socialists do have their uses.

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Department of Social Anthropology and School of Biological Sciences

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Quote ref. 350/93.

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Completed applications to be returned by 10/1/94.

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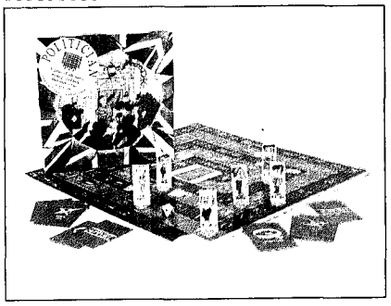

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COURSES/CONFERENCES

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

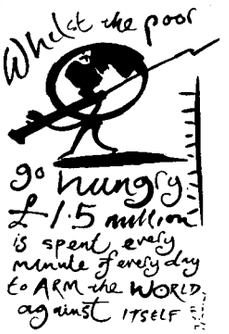
SATURDAY,

27 NOVEMBER 1993

CENTRAL HALL,
Storey's Gate, Westminster,
London SW1H 9NH

Sessions include:
- **Beating Racism North & South**
- **Palestine and South Africa: Roads to Freedom**
- **Overseas Aid: A Policy for the Future**

Speakers include:
* Mirna Cunningham MP (Nicaragua)
* Mendi Msimang, UK Representative, ANC
* Afif Safieh, UK Representative, PLO
* Tom Clarke MP, Shadow Spokesperson on Overseas Aid & Co-operation
* Glyn Ford, MEP
* Julia Haüserman, Rights & Humanity
* Doreen Cameron, Vice President, NATFE



Registration: 10.30am. Conference Finishes 4pm. Cost £2.

For a registration form and further information telephone 071-620 1111

WAR ON WANT
CAMPAIGN AGAINST WORLD POVERTY

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

The Hilda Hulme Memorial Lecture in English Literature entitled:

"What happens in OTHELLO?"

will be given by **Professor Denis Donoghue** (Henry James Chair of English and American Letters, New York University)

at 5.30pm on Monday 6 December 1993
in the Beverage Hall at the University of London, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU.

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Have we got **News for You**

The ILP's new "Have We Got News For You" newspaper presents

"Who pays for the Budget Blues, the unjust society and Labour's alternatives."

Guest Speaker: Peter Hain MP
Gary Kent – ILP. *Chair:* Harry Barnes MP

THURSDAY 25 NOVEMBER, 7.30PM
Committee Room 11, House of Commons

Copies of the ILP's brand new campaigning paper, *Have We Got News For You* and details of the ILP's *Stop VAT on Fuel* campaign will be available at the meeting. Or phone the Campaign Hotline on 0532 430613 for details of campaigning materials.

London ILP is pleased to provide speakers for meetings and debates. For further information contact Margo Sweeney on 071 511 0566. Or at 30 Bridgeland Rd, London E16 3AD

Day Conference

The Future of the Welfare State

A discussion of the economic and social policies Labour needs to defend universal benefits and the welfare state

Saturday 4th December

10.30am - 4.30pm

Congress House Great Russell St, London WC1

(Tottenham Court Road tube)

Speakers include:

Bill Morris, General Secretary (TGWU);
John Edmonds, General Secretary, GMB;
Bryan Gould MP;
Diana Jeuda, Political Officer USDAW;
Professor Peter Townsend, University of Bristol;
Margaret Prosser, National Organiser TGWU;
Dawn Primarolo MP;
Dr Brian Burkitt, University of Bradford;
Ken Livingstone MP;
Dr Paul Dunne, University of Leeds;
Diane Abbott MP;
Jean Corston MP;
Larry Elliott, Guardian Economics Correspondent;
Jean Geldart, TUC General Councillor UNISON;
Tony Chater, Editor, Morning Star;
Ann Pettifor, Labour Women's Action Committee

Sessions include:

- Defending the welfare state in Europe in the 1990s
- Funding the welfare state
- The myth that we can't afford adequate social provision
- Universality versus the means test
- Women and the welfare state
- Defence spending, investment and economic growth
- Disabilities and invalidity benefits

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CULTURED SINGLE ENGLISHMAN, n/s, retired but busy, not left wing, seeks attractive, independent, younger woman (40-50?), earthy but fastidious, for relaxed, mutually rewarding, unpossessive relationship. (London). Please write to Box (139) 711.

ATTRACTIVE, TALLISH, GRADUATE WOMAN, young 43, emotional, caring, enjoys theatre, reading, travel, good food, seeks company of n/s, non-sexist, intelligent man (38-50) with view to lasting relationship. London area. Write with photo to Box (140) 714.

OXFORD BASED MAN (28), balding, bearded, bespectacled, big-eared, seeks smart, cuddly n/s feminist (25ish-30-ish) for pizza, friendship. Likes books, music, guitars, France. Brains essential. Looks a bonus. Please write to Box (140) 715.

EDUCATED, DECENT, HUMOROUS MAN, having reached middle age without family, intends to remedy this. In good condition, financially secure (not rich), affectionate, unattached, currently London, but relocatable. Any ladies (maybe mothers already) interested? Please write to Box (140) 716.

TOO GENTLE, TOO SHY, unpretentious, mature, educated bachelor, country-loving/living, servile. Good job, wide interests, seeks opposite natured female under 50. Please write to Box (140) 717.

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Groups

SOCIAL GROUPS meet other independent professionals in South London at social events. South Circular Activities Group. 081-673 8119.

DEPRESSION SUPPORT GROUP ASSOCIATION invites sufferers of depression interested in managing this condition to contact the Association. The Association's Group Conveners have been Group members and have been helped to successfully moderate their own depressive tendencies. There are ongoing Groups in Central London and Groups in prospect in SE and SW London. For information contact: DSGA, 37b New Cavendish Street, London W1M 8JR. Tel: 071-328 8391.

Meetings

IGNORE THE PABULUM ON THE BOX: Why and how the CIA killed John F. Kennedy: a lecture on the 30th anniversary by Paul Rigby. On the agenda: Why the Zapruder film is a fake; who fired the kill-shot; rethinking Chomsky: a "company" intellectual as New Left guru. Southport Arts Centre, 22 November. 0704-540011. £3/£1.

COMMUNITIES IN STRUGGLE: IS THERE COMMON GROUND? Public meeting bringing together Cathy McCormack, Kumar Murshid and Enrique Picado, community activists from Glasgow, East London and Nicaragua. 7pm Caxton House, 129 St Johns Way, London N19 (Tube: Archway). £2/£1 concs. Details: Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG. Phone: 071-272 9619.

SHAW SOCIETY. Friday 26th November. Michael Holroyd on "The Biography Dramatised". Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn. Coffee 6.30pm. Lecture 7pm.

Conference

ROADS TO FREEDOM: National Liberation Struggles, Power and Liberty. Conference on how freedom is won and kept by liberation struggles across the world. 10.30-5pm Saturday 27th November, SOAS, London. Details from Palestine Solidarity Campaign, 071-700 6192.

Volunteers

DRINKLINE provides information, advice and support to callers who are worried about their own or someone else's drinking. We operate 7 nights a week between 6-11pm and we urgently need more volunteers to join our team of committed Helpliners. Prospective Helpliners will be required to attend an initial training period. Ongoing supervision and training is provided. Please contact us on: 071-332 0150.

Gifts

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Editor Steve Platt
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ENDGAMES: Weekend Competition

No 3303 Set by Margaret Rogers
Challenge Anneka gets to overhaul the Conservative Party.

Report by Ms de Meaner
Not much room, so £12 to the winners is about all I'm going to say. PS: I have received a letter from the computer, an Acorn Archimedes, that won the anagram comp (signed: Arch) admitting to the fact. A computer with a sense of honour. Hmm!

Anneka: Golly! This is exciting! Only ten minutes to go and we still don't know whether the challenge is successful. A team of surgeons has worked round the clock to perform cosmetic miracles on the most deeply unattractive government of modern times. Michael Howard is working on sincerity with an expert on role-play. Twenty speech therapists are slaving away on John Major. And all the lawyers (and that means most of them) are undergoing deep hypnosis so that they can forget their training. And it's working because several of them are already using the words "public service" and talking about Society and Compassion without smirking. The SAS have been terrific, kidnapping electoral liabilities like Peter Lilley and shredding all the documents relating to rail privatisation. And —would you believe it?—we've got these marvellous pre-fab confessionals and a specially trained group of counsellors who are being wonderfully supportive and encouraging ministers to say "sorry" and "we were wrong" and do penance—oh, look! There's Virginia Bottomley in her rather fetching nun's habit, scourging herself. And gosh! Don't let's forget all those tremendous doctors who've worked so terrifically hard to anaesthetise the erogenous zones —Golly! Am I allowed to say that?—of those conference speakers who get multiple orgasms from standing ovations.

Come on, everyone! It's a tremendous effort, really super! And it's dead easy compared with our next challenge, which is to train this litter of pigs in Sussex to fly . . .

Watson Weeks

Anneka (earnestly on phone): Hello?. . . Yes, hello! It's—gosh, this is amazing!—Anneka Rice here, and all we need are a few little policies and we can literally paint the town red! I mean, blue! I mean, not literally! . . .You have? Oh golly, this is just fantastic . . . *(to camera, thumbs up)* He says he's got some policies we can have for absolutely nothing!!. . .Yes, terrific! . . .Golly, that is a good one . . . *(to camera)* He says he would bring all the people together as members of one Britain . . . and he'd give special attention to the people in the north, because they're often forgotten, he's right there, I often forget—what? No, sorry, just me interrupting! Sorry! Do you have a tax! . . . You know all about a tax? Golly! . . . You expect a tax on yourself, because of what you stand for? Would you want a tax on everyone? Only those in the south? I see. I think. Golly . . . Too many Conservatives subscribe to what the mass says? Well yes, that does sound wrong!! . . . What? And you'd stop them by starting to roam . . . roam . . . gosh, that's frightful! . . . And you're against the paper sea? *The Paper Sea*, what a catchy phrase for all those memos whizzing pointlessly around! Yes, I think we can certainly use your ideas. These'll make the party as strong as it was under Home! . . . Sorry? . . . Home. Yes, Home . . . Oh bother, he's rung off. Can someone get me Dr Paisley's number again?

Bill Greenwell

Anneka: Gosh! This is a hairy assignment. I just hope he's in. *(a door opens)*
A: Hi. Mr Heath?
Sir Edward Heath (beams wordlessly)
A: OK, smashing, look I need your help in saving a once great institution. Can I count on your support?
H (smiling woodenly): How can I help?
A: No time to explain. Come on! *(She takes his hand and they exit to a waiting helicopter. Cut to cockpit.)*
A (yelling): OK, I've talked to Ted here and the main problem we've got is that most of the people we need are dead. *(Cut to an open-plan office. A is jabbering animatedly into a mobile phone. Next to her sit Sir Ian Gilmour, Sir Francis Pym and other superannuated wets.)*
A: OK, Ted's drafted in some support, but it's a massive task and there isn't much time. Sorry, chaps, but we need more muscle. I've just spoken to Kenneth Clarke and he's promised to throw his weight behind us. So it looks like WE HAVE LIFT OFF!! *(Cut to Tory Central Office. Grinning men in hard hats are tearing down posters of John Major, shredding copies of the Rail Privatisation Bill, and so on)*
A (into her mobile phone): Yes —200 Disraeli busts please—by this afternoon? Great! *(to camera)* Well, it's been quite a challenge, but it looks . . .
(Suddenly a face looms in front of the camera)
Lady Thatcher (with heartfelt sincerity): Anneka, I'm a huge admirer of yours, so I simply had to come along. Now, let's get down to business . . .

Peter Norman

Continuity Announcer: And now a change from our advertised programme. Viewers in England and Wales would normally be expecting to see *Challenge Anneka*. In this week's programme, Anneka was meant to be restoring a fine old institution, the Tory party, to its former glory. As regular viewers will know, Anneka completes her challenges by persuading prominent people and businesses to do all the work—thus gaining valuable publicity for themselves —while she takes the credit for making it all happen.

Unfortunately, though Miss Rice contacted wealthy Hong Kong businessmen, ex-Guinness directors (one of whom had miraculously recovered from Alzheimer's) and the writer Geoffrey Bowman, no one felt that getting involved with this particular project would do them any good. Anneka was therefore unable to get anyone to help her.

We are therefore showing an episode of *The Good Life* instead, in which Tom gets up to his neck in manure, and Barbara tries to keep her head above water.

Mark Wiggen

No 3306 Set by Leonora Casement
You should all be familiar with the style of Mat Coward. We would like to see excerpts from a Coward article on something he would never write about in a million years. Max 200 words and in by 2 December.

Gryph's Cryptic Quiz has been held over due to lack of space

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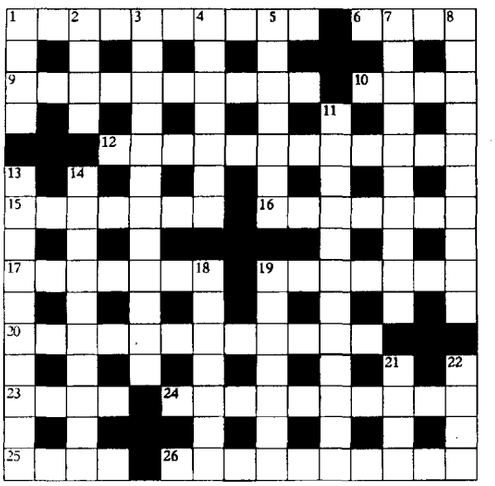
CROSSWORD

Crossword 1672
£5 book tokens for the first three correct solutions opened. Entries to Crossword 1672, New Statesman & Society, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ, by Monday 29 November.

ACROSS
1. Take part in government as a means of selling a priest (10)
6. Cabin key (4)
9. Fishing smack? What nonsense! (10)
10. Plant which is fashionable when carried by a scholar (4)
12. Plant which shows up her wounds too badly (12)
15. Fretted when the tree appeared in colour (7)
16. T S Eliot translated for ladies and gentlemen (7)
17. The bloody newspaper returned and had a leading article falsified (7)
19. Where romance comes in disguise (7)
20. How to call a variant of true clan without a sign (12)
23. Lacking feminine lead the truth becomes bits of play (4)
24. One who finds out a record ended with hesitation? (10)
25. River which comes from the Broads (4)
26. Here actors may be found places for putting about Othello's turn (10)

DOWN
1. Chief for a time without a capital (4)
2. Produced a girl, we hear (4)
3. Island discovered in fresh territory (12)
4. Unhappy about an instrument being honoured (7)
5. Eating away like an animal from the east (7)
7. A tough animal but battered in his ring corner (10)
8. Something to eat which makes the spirit break (5,4)
11. Transport worker needing different waterway (12)
13. Illegal activity is potentially a big danger (10)
14. One who bears a grudge about capital needed for medical equipment (10)
18. Learn about the sick getting up although he takes things easy (7)
19. The skin has to count for something about a pound (7)
21. Florence's flower (4)
22. Cockney hurts his limbs (4)



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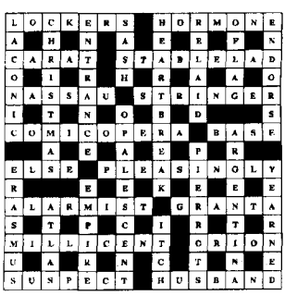

Winners of Crossword 1670
C Diamond, Essex
J Bennett, Cheshire
M Coan, Edinburgh

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BACKCHAT

Mat Coward just can't keep up with the unacceptable faces of Toryism

"Who would you say is the ugliest living Tory?" a friend asked me the other day, adding, before I had a chance to respond, "I think it must be Michael Howard, don't you? Now that Selwyn Gummer is dead, I mean."

"Selwyn Gummer isn't dead," I pointed out. "He's always smelt like that. But tell me, why do you ask? Is the relative ugliness of leading Tories really something upon which today's cultured gentleman is expected to hold an opinion?"

"Well," she responded tartly, "it is a subject on which you have publicly expressed several opinions in the past, and I was wondering why you have not done so recently. I thought, foolishly perhaps, that you would welcome an opportunity to discuss what was once among your best-loved topics. But I realise now, of course, that you have grown too grand for such innocent jollity. You are far too busy philosophising, and prescribing, and generally . . ."

"All right!" I cried, my resolution shattered by her goads, "Virginia Bottomley—she is the ugliest living Tory!" My friend snorted in derision. "Oh, but now you are speaking for effect," she sneered. "You cannot honestly suggest that the Health Secretary is uglier than the Home Secretary, the aforementioned Turd of Turd Hall."

"On the contrary," I countered. "Mrs Bottomley's ugliness is the more extraordinary because it is of recent mintage. Mr Howard was born ugly, whereas Mrs Bottomley has become ugly, and becomes indeed daily uglier. Her ugliness comes from within, and grows more extreme with every act of wickedness she commits."

"Sophistry," she sniffed. "At least you can't deny that Portillo is a grotesque of outstanding degree, with his upside-down head and back-to-front body. You will allow, I suppose, that Lilley has the kind of looks a belch would have if you gave it form, and then dressed it randomly but at great expense.

"And why do we hear nothing from you concerning the one, I forget his name, with the floury complexion, the permanently singed eyebrows, the expression of a 15-year-old who has just wet the bed for the first time in ten years?"

"I imagine you mean John Patten," I said, "since, if you were describing Kenneth Clarke, you would have used terms such as 'disembowelled without notice' to convey the unique ugliness of his posture and visage."

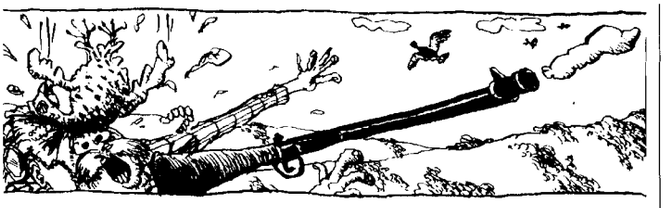
"You see? It's coming back to you," she said. "It is doing nothing of the sort," I objected. "Listen: do you really want to know why I no longer pen columns on what was formerly my favourite subject matter? Do you? Because I just can't keep up, that's why. There, now it's out, and I trust you are satisfied with the results of your probing.

"When I started writing about ugly Tories, men like Keith Joseph and Cecil Parkinson provided the standard by which others were judged. Monsters, we thought them then, but how was I to know that within a few, fleeting years, such creatures would be held handsome in comparison to their successors? How could I possibly foretell a day when parliament would ooze with Mellors and Widdecombes?"

My friend was sympathetic. "I appreciate your difficulty," she said. "But even so, will you not at least confirm my view that Mr Rifkind resembles a bulimic victim of gang-buggery?"

I sighed. "Very well, since what you say is self-evident. But, I insist, thus far and no farther. And now, let that be an end to it."

FORTEANA



Paul Sieveking on the latest heavenly pursuit to grab America—angelology

A Gallup poll last year showed that 80 per cent of US citizens believe God performs miracles. Of course, the term "miracle" can include anything from a bleeding Blessed Virgin to a medically inexplicable remission of cancer. The latest supernatural trend across the pond is angelology. A more recent Gallup poll indicated that 50 per cent believed in chaps with wings.

Angels get the job done, insist the authors of *Ask Your Angels* (1992), who describe just a handful of miracles that happened to their friends: a large metal tyre-iron bounced from a truck and was headed for Carolina's windshield—just feet away, it disappeared. Joe was in an ammo dump in Vietnam when it was struck by an enemy mortar round—184 men died and Joe walked away untouched. On a more mundane level, Polly saw an angel in her kitchen when she was baking, and Ben's been talking to angels (and they've been talking back) since childhood.

Ask Your Angels joins a bunch of books enjoying celestial sales figures, including Billy Graham's pioneering *Angels—God's Secret Agents*, published in the 1970s; *The Book of Angels* (1989) and *Angel Letters* (1991) by Sophy Burnham; *Messengers of Light: The Angels' Guide to Spiritual Growth* (1990) by Terry Lynn Taylor; and *Ask Your Angels: a Practical Guide to Working with the Messengers of Heaven* by Alma Daniel and Timothy Wyllie (1993). The books all subscribe to a basic scenario: vast multitudes of angels, who are in "a lightly finer vibrational frequency from the one to which our physical senses are tuned" (that's why we usually can't "see" them), are available to help us work through problems ranging from relationship woes to material needs and planetary environmental plagues. They are easily contacted through meditative techniques.

There is a burgeoning angel industry, including workshops, conferences, and five specialist mail-order companies flogging angelic lapel-pins, tapes, and T-shirts. In August this year, 50-odd people gathered in the aptly named New Mexico village of Angel Fire for a week-long "Angels and Nature Spirits Conference" (attendance fee: $1,200). The Associated Press reporter watched as Rebecca Proud of Laguna Beach, California, stood transfixed, hugging a tree. She said she was facing a difficult career decision. "I've been a dental hygienist", she explained. A man lay on the grass, "talking with elves", while others pointed at the sky oohing and aahing; in the high, wispy clouds they saw the outline of an angel. The conference culminated in "an evening of fun and games with the local nature spirits and fairy folks".

After attending a workshop on angels last year, Eileen Freeman decided to share her angelic experiences. She founded, and now edits, *Angel Watch*, a bimonthly newsletter about angels in the world today. She has also founded Angel Watch Network, a national clearing house of information on the subject. There is also a toll-free number to ring: 1-800 28 ANGEL.

Freeman's interest in angels dates from a visitation from her guardian angel when she was five. "I was afraid to go to sleep because my grandmother had died and I had a lot of fears associated with that. I was feeling very cold and upset and there was a light at the foot of my bed that grew until I couldn't see the rest of the room." An angel emerged from the light, she said, and identified himself as Ennis. "He had very long and fine hair that seemed to flow and blow around him. His face was somewhat angular and utterly serene. I never saw any wings and his lower body seemed lost in the mist. I remember his eyes most of all because they were so full of passion for the plight of a five year old. It drained all the fear out of me. He told me not to be afraid, that my grandmother was not mouldering in some cold old grave."

Since that time, Freeman, a graduate in comparative religion, who lives in Mountainside, New Jersey, has had repeated contact with Ennis and a host of other angelic visitors. Her new book, *Touched by Angels*, is doing well. Obviously, the angelic marketplace has yet to reach saturation point.

Paul Sieveking is editor of "Fortean Times"

Felix Dennis

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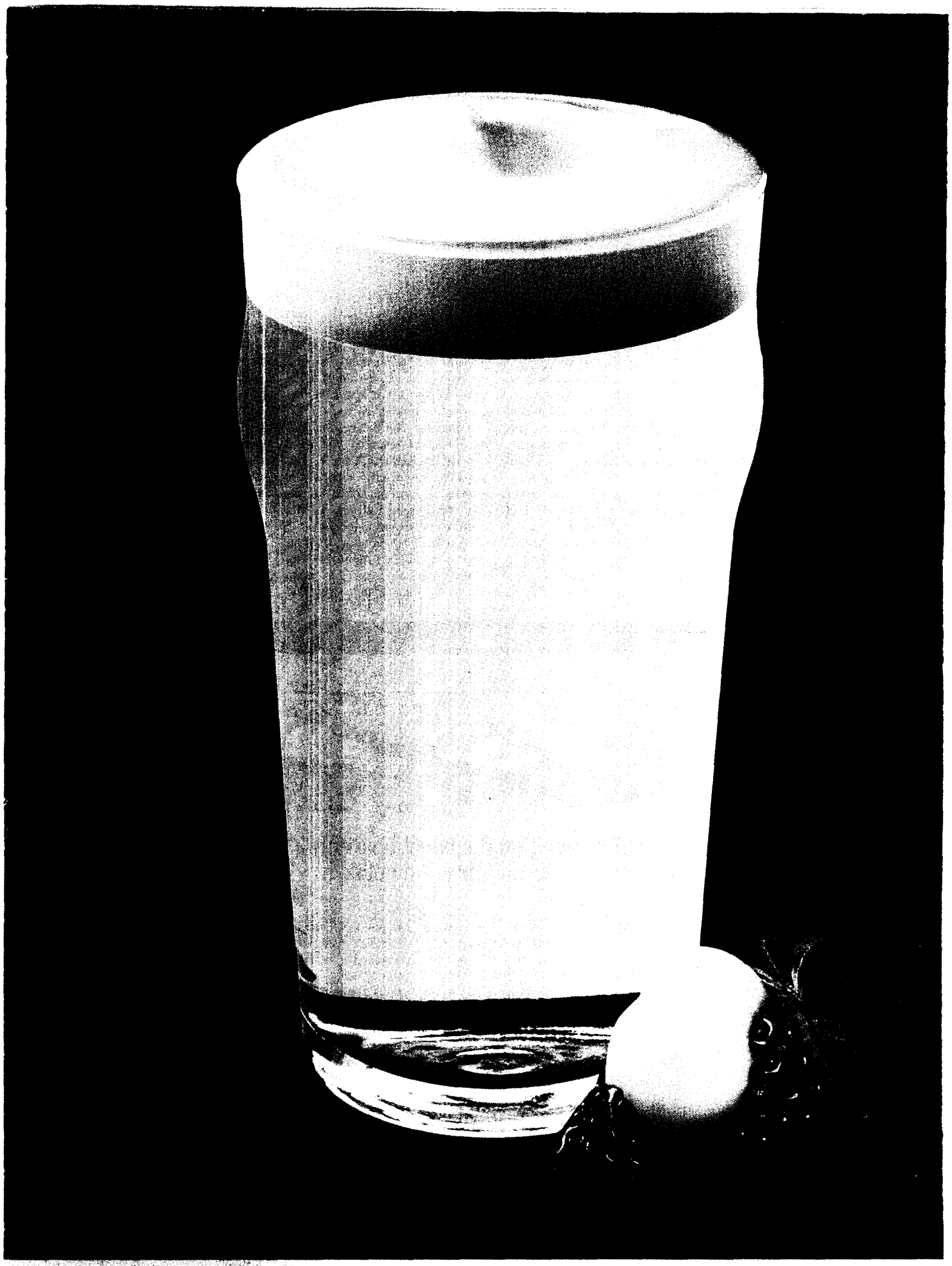

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